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CHAPTER XL.

"I AM afraid Bertha is getting herself entangled with young Mr. Cavot," remarked the Duchess of Morton to the Dowager Countess of Chineron, as they sat together in a recess of the ball-room at Mortoun Castle.

The countess looked absently at Bertha, as though thinking of something else. Bertha was at the moment dancing with Robert Cavot, and really looked quite animated—even beautiful. "Well, what objection have you to Mr. Cavot?" she asked, as though utterly indifferent about the matter.

"Objection?" echoed the duchess. "He may be everything that's excellent for aught I know, but he is not a suitable party for Bertha Chineron."

"Oh, I dare say Bertha will follow her own inclination—why should not she?" answered the countess in the same apathetic manner.

"You take things rather coolly," said the duchess in an annoyed tone. "I imagined you regarded the name of Chineron with far more pride."

"What can I do? Bertha is not amenable to me for her actions."

"But you might show your disapprobation, at least."

"Well, what if I do disapprove? You should remember that Bertha is free to marry whom she will."

"Really, as I said, you take things coolly. One would have imagined nothing could be more distasteful to you than for your son's widow to marry beneath her."

"Bertha will not heed my feelings on such a matter," replied the countess with a bored air. "I shall never seek to influence her choice one way or the other."

"Well, if you are content, I assure you I am not," said the duchess knitting her brows. "I mean to have a talk with Mr. Cavot. He should have more sense of the fitness of things. What position has he to offer to the widow of an earl, with twenty thousand a year in her own right?"

Before the countess could reply Lady Maud joined them. "Why are you not dancing?" asked the duchess, as she made room for the young lady to sit beside her. "Where is Norland?"

Lady Maud pointed with her fan at a pair who were just on the point of standing up for the next quadrille.

"Who is he standing up with?" asked the duchess, putting her glass to her eye. "I don't seem to remember the girl."

"Neither do I," said the countess, applying her glass to her eye also. "Who is she, Maud?"

"Miss Miffkins."

"Miffkins!" exclaimed the duchess, elevating her eyebrows; "who on earth is Miffkins? and how came she here?"

"She goes everywhere. The men don't consider a dance worth attending unless graced by the pretty American."

"Has the air of a French opera-dancer," replied the duchess. "I wish Ellen would be rather more exclusive."

"Haven't I told you the fair Miffkins goes everywhere? She was at Marlborough House the other evening."

"That is no reason that she should be at Mortoun Castle this evening," said the duchess with a shrug of her shoulders. "Miffkins! Heavens, what a name!"

Lady Maud laughed. "Algy thinks it poetical. He has already danced three times with Miffkins, and is down on her card for—well, perhaps as many more."

Algy was the duchess's grandson and heir to the dukedom. The ball had been given at the castle in honour of his coming of age.

"And how many times has she danced with Norland?" asked the duchess, tapping the young lady's arm with her fan.

"Haven't taken note. When she's not dancing with Algy she favours Norland above all others. Next to diamonds an American girl loves a duke; and really the fair Miffkins seems to have bor-

rowed the entire stock-in-trade of Storr and Mortimer for this particular event," said Lady Maud.

"I am heartily tired of the American beauties; they are quite too bizarre and pushing. There's not the least refinement or repose about them. Look at that girl, dancing with the zest of a ballerino," remarked the countess, with a cold, contemptuous stare at the unconscious Miss Miffkins, who was skimming over the floor with tiny twinkling feet, like an Andalusian maid.

"She has a certain kind of prettiness, for all that," said the duchess rather maliciously. "Norland evidently admires her vastly, and all the world considers his taste unexceptionable."

"Algy will tell you that she is adorable, spiritual and——"

"Divine!" added a merry voice close beside her.

"Oh, Algy. I was sure you'd say so," cried Lady Maud. "But have you a moment to spare to any one but your divinity?"

"My thoughts are with her—my outer man remains entirely at your service," replied the youth gaily, as he offered Lady Maud his arm.

"The rooms are getting rather warm. I should like an ice," said Lady Maud as they moved about among the guests.

"Let us go into the conservatory; I'll bring you an ice there," suggested Algy good-naturedly.

He seated her beneath a spreading palm, then hastened away to get her some refreshment from the buffet.

The quadrille was ended by this time; some of the dancers came into the conservatory to enjoy its refreshing coolness. Lady Maud drew back under the shade of the palm tree and remained unnoticed.

Suddenly she drew a quick breath and shrank still further into the shade; the Duke of Norland at that moment entered the conservatory with the fair American leaning on his arm.

She was a bright piquant brunette with dark sparkling eyes, very white teeth, which she was somewhat lavish to display, and a tall lissom figure that possessed a sort of willowy motion as she walked, quite unlike the graceful, upright carriage of an English maiden of the upper ten.

She was exquisitely attired in the newest Parisian *mode* and perhaps a little too overlaid with pearls and diamonds for an unmarried woman; but fresh, fascinating and brilliantly beautiful withal.

"No, no, I shall not dance with you again to-night; I stand too much in fear of Mrs. Grundy to do anything so dreadfully improper as to monopolize the best dancer of the party," she said laughingly, as they walked through the conservatory and passed out through the south door on to the garden terrace.

Lady Maud rose up and looked after the pair with a gleam in her eye and a smile on her lip.

Then she drew her chair forward to the light and sat down to await the return of Algy.

He did not put her patience to the test, however; in a few minutes she saw him coming towards her, followed by a footman bearing light refreshments enough for half-a-dozen ladies at the least.

Algy appeared rather disappointed when he found she would partake of nothing but an ice, although he, himself, after lauding champagne as the only perfect restorative, simply contented himself with a glass of iced lemonade.

"You see," said he, by way of explanation, "I have to tread another measure with the divine——"

"Miffkins," interposed Lady Maud with a silvery laugh.

"Oh, pray don't, you madden me! What a horrid name!" he cried, with a comical expression of horror. "Miffkins! No rose could be perfect with such a name; one of us fellows ought to marry the divine creature, if only out of pure charity to bestow on her a more euphonious cognomen."

"Are not you in a charitable mood yourself? Your name would go rather better with diamonds than her own."

Algy laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "I am a Christian, and with us charity should begin at home," said he in a mock-heroic tone. "I think of the horror of my grandam should I be rash enough to offer to graft a Miffkins on the genealogical tree."

Lady Maud could not help laughing at this little pleasantry, calling him a naughty satirical boy as she took his arm and sauntered towards the south door of the conservatory.

On stepping on to the terrace, Algy drew back quickly; he had caught sight of Norland and the fair American standing rather too closely together for mere ball-room acquaintances.

Lady Maud, however, went straight onward with a calm smile on her lips. Did she see the duke or did she not? He was

standing within a few paces on her left, with his arm around the waist of the fascinating American girl, one of her ungloved hands pressed to his lips.

If the high-bred English girl saw this she made no sign. They might have been a pair of marble statues adorning the terrace for all the notice she took of them.

Turning to the right, she walked along the terrace with her usual quiet graceful movement. She neither bridled up nor flashed looks of scorn on her affianced lover, as some less thorough-bred woman might have done.

"Well, I call that too bad. Norland is behaving shamefully," exclaimed Algy, when they were out of hearing.

"What, jealous?" cried Lady Maud, elevating her eyebrows.

"Phew, no! but I thought you wouldn't like such goings on as that."

"Oh, it matters not in the least to me."

"No! is it possible?"

"Quite, I assure you."

"Really, but then you are engaged to him, you know."

"We are no longer engaged," she said proudly.

"And you are free?" cried the young man eagerly, his eyes becoming luminous as with some inward light.

Lady Maud withdrew her hand from his arm; her face became overclouded with sadness.

"Free!" she echoed. "Yes, free as the night wind that sighs over some wintry waste—just as free, and as cold, and as lonely for aye."

"Maud—dearest Maud, will you listen to me?" he cried with breathless eagerness, trying to take her hand.

"No, Algy, no. I have loved and lost—I shall never listen to a love tale again—so let us continue friends as of old."

"One moment, Maud, only one moment," he pleaded, as she was about to retire through an open French window that led to her own room.

"No, not one," she laughed, resuming her gayest air. "Go and tread the promised measure with Miffkins the fair, who doubtless begins to wonder what has become of her truant knight."

I am sorry to relate that the young nobleman anathematized Miss Miffkins savagely when Lady Maud glided through the French window and closed the casement behind her.

CHAPTER XLI.

ONE morning, not long after the ball at Mortoun Castle, the Dowager Countess of Chineron was seated with her daughter at a round breakfast-table in the south dining-room of Chillingwood House.

She was looking pale and worn, lines of care were beginning to furrow her fair, smooth brow, and in the full morning light her hair looked faded, even grey.

A pile of letters lay unopened at her side, but she appeared too listless and preoccupied to make the least exertion.

"I think, Maud," she remarked peevishly, "that it is time to bring matters to a conclusion. Your engagement has lasted quite long enough. I shall ask Hardbend to hint as much to Norland."

"It can only come to one conclusion after Norland's behaviour with Miss Miffkins," replied her daughter firmly.

"Pooh, nonsense! You surely do not intend to break off your engagement because Norland carried on a ball-room flirtation with some underbred girl."

Her daughter raised her head with quiet dignity.

"Mother, in this instance I claim the right to decide for myself."

"Think well before taking any rash step," said the countess severely. "If you break with Norland you must be prepared to give up society altogether. I have decided not to chaperon you this season; my nerves are too shattered at present to go out even to a quiet dinner. I had hoped that your marriage would have taken place shortly after our return home from the continent; besides, I find that the English climate no longer suits me, and moving about alone alleviates the *ennui* from which I suffer. Are you prepared to accompany me in my wanderings, and to bear with the constant complaining of a capricious invalid for, it may be, years to come, until you are a weazened, neglected old maid yourself?—and this will certainly be your ultimate fate should you break off your engagement with Norland. Such a step, I warn you, would end all chance of your ever being sought in marriage by an eligible *parti* again."

"I am bound to retain my own self-respect at any cost," replied the young lady, with an expression of countenance that

for the moment made her strangely like her proud, inflexible mother.

The countess sighed wearily, but made no answer, and at once began to open her letters.

Lady Maud, who had also a small pile of letters to hand, followed her mother's example, and soon no other sound broke the stillness which pervaded the room save the crisp rustle of unfolding letters.

Suddenly a low moan smote on the ear of the young girl. Looking up quickly, she found her mother had fallen back in her chair, white and rigid as death itself.

Lady Maud flew to the bell and rung it violently; then, without waiting for assistance to arrive, began to bathe her mother's brow with eau de cologne, which she fortunately found close at hand.

It was some time before the countess opened her eyes and made an effort to recollect herself. Then a shudder ran through her frame as she whispered, like one awaking from a painful dream, "The blow has fallen at last!"

It was too evident she had received a sudden shock which might prove dangerous.

With great presence of mind the house steward immediately dispatched a mounted messenger for the family medical attendant, but before he arrived the countess recovered sufficiently to reach her own room with the assistance of her maids. Before she rose from her chair, however, she took care to have all her letters gathered up and given into her own hands.

She would not suffer her daughter to stay with her. She said perfect quiet and repose would alone restore her—her nerves were too shattered to bear even her daughter's presence for awhile.

Thoughtfully and sadly Lady Maud retired to await Doctor Ashley's arrival. Some secret care, she felt certain, had long preyed on her mother's mind, and now doubtless the blow she dreaded had fallen. But what dire misfortune could have happened to prostrate her all in a moment?

She wearied her brain in vain to guess even from whence such a terrible blow had fallen with that death-like force.

When the countess's medical attendant reached her bedside he found her lethargic and feverish. That she had received a sudden shock he at once concluded, but of what nature, or from

whence it came, neither her daughter nor her attendants quite knew. The letter that might have thrown some light on the subject had been burnt by the countess's own maid by her mistress's order before she would consent to lay her head on the pillow. This fact, however, the maid, who was an old and faithful attendant, did not think fit to disclose, so the cause of her ladyship's illness remained a mystery.

Before many hours elapsed the countess became quite unconscious, and for weeks lay prostrated with brain fever.

Through her long illness Lady Maud watched by her bedside with unwearied attention and devoted, affectionate zeal.

It was seldom she allowed any one but Prior, her ladyship's devoted attendant, to share her watch by the sufferer's bedside.

There were short intervals of apparent return to consciousness, when it was sad to see the eager, questioning gaze with which she would regard her daughter's face. At such times her faithful attendant, ever on the watch, would approach her mistress and say in a calm, reassuring tone, "There are no letters to-day, my lady, nor is there any message for your ladyship." This oft-repeated formula seemed to soothe the sufferer, who would close her eyes with a profound sigh of relief, and sometimes fall into a troubled sleep.

But there were times when nothing could soothe or allay the dread of some impending calamity overtaking her.

There were times, also, of fearful delirium, when the sick woman raved of people and things that made Lady Maud shiver and feel sick at heart. She tried her best to think it was only the fancies of a fevered brain; but, alas, try as she would, she could not divest herself of a growing conviction that the mother whom she had always thought the nearest to perfection of any mortal, was not the immaculate, high-souled woman she had been taught to reverence from her earliest years.

When at length the fever abated and the countess regained consciousness, her cold impassive manner began to return, but that haunted look still lingered in her eyes; she was as imperious, too, and self-willed as ever. Spite of the remonstrances of her attendants and the express command of her physician, she insisted on rising from her couch and reclining on the sofa in her dressing-room before an open window ere the fever had left her a week, but no one as yet had been allowed to see her or con-

verse with her, the doctors fearing a relapse if she were not kept perfectly quiet and free from all excitement.

The countess was not pronounced out of danger when word was sent to Lady Maud that Charley, her little nephew, had been ailing for some days past, and it was feared that he had caught the scarlet fever, which was then raging in the village close by Chillingwood Chase.

How to break this disquieting intelligence to her mother, Lady Maud knew not, as the countess was thought to be devotedly attached to her grandson. To her daughter's great relief, however, she took the matter very calmly, merely remarking that Bertha was always too anxious about Charley and his childish ailments.

To the surprise of every one around her the countess rapidly regained strength ; it seemed as though her iron will was able to overcome even weakness and prostration.

"Maud, I must have change of air ; this place is killing me !" she said quite abruptly to her daughter one morning, as she sat propped up with pillows in an easy-chair. "I know Doctor Ashley will say I am not strong enough to travel, but I begin to feel that is my only chance of final recovery."

Her daughter knew not what to answer. She saw plainly that her mother was quite unfit to take a journey, however short, in her present state of health. "What would you have me do ?" she asked, not daring to point out the utter impossibility of complying with the invalid's wish.

"I would have you give orders to pack up immediately, and prepare for our leaving England within the week at latest. We can travel by easy stages, rest a few days at Folkestone and again at Boulogne. Meantime, do not oppose my wish ; rather set my mind at ease by promising to comply with what I so eagerly desire, then I will take all the rest I can and gather up my strength for the journey."

"I shall be only too pleased to comply with your wishes," answered her daughter. "No doubt a change will do you good. Prior must see about making every necessary arrangement for your comfort without delay."

The young lady thought it best to humour the invalid, as her highly nervous condition rendered the least opposition to her wishes dangerous.

After the countess received this reassuring answer she sat silent for some minutes with her head resting on her hand. Then all at once she asked in a confused, hesitating manner if any unpleasant intelligence had arrived during her illness, or in fact had anything unusual taken place recently?

She looked up quickly as she asked the latter question, and fixed her eyes searchingly on her daughter's face.

Lady Maud trembled and turned pale; sad news had indeed arrived not an hour since, but she had not dared communicate it to the invalid until Doctor Ashley's arrival, fearing the effect it would produce on her mother in her present weak, nervous condition.

The countess was quick to note her daughter's agitation. "I know you are keeping something back from me!" she exclaimed, her hands beginning to tremble with nervous anxiety, her face to look flushed and her eyes troubled. "Something unpleasant has happened, I read it in your face. I can bear anything rather than this dreadful suspense, so pray tell me the worst at once!"

"You know already that Charley has been dangerously ill," hesitated her daughter.

"I know he is ill, but not dangerously so; well, go on, you have something worse to tell me!"

Lady Maud broke down and burst into tears. She could find no words to tell her mother that the little heir of the house lay dead.

The countess fell back in her chair and shaded her face with her fan, as a long shivering sigh escaped her; she at once realized the cause of this sudden fit of weeping.

Then followed a long silence, broken only by the heartrending sobs of Lady Maud, who could no longer control her long pent-up emotion. She was devotedly attached to her little nephew, who had always been regarded as the heir and hope of the house of Chineron.

Suddenly the countess started and, clasping her hands, uttered a low moan. The sound of the passing-bell with its solemn note of warning to careless mortals that none are too young to die, tolled out the number of years of him who had just passed away.

"Poor darling boy, he is at rest—at rest," murmured the invalid softly. "Well, it is better so; they cannot rob him of his rest."

CHAPTER XLII.

NO one ever heard the countess mention the name of her little grandson after his death. Her most trusted attendant could not have told whether the sorrow that clouded her life had been deepened by the early death of the young heir.

She was never seen to shed a tear, but then the countess was not one given to weeping. The deepest sorrow is often borne with hot, dry, tearless eyes.

She gained strength, however, daily and daily grew more impatient to set out on her journey.

Her only relief appeared to be in watching trunk after trunk packed and corded, in readiness for her departure.

She could not well tear Lady Maud away from the side of the poor bereaved mother, who was utterly heart-broken over the loss of her only son ; but she decided to start on the very next day after the funeral.

But when the day arrived Lady Maud was found utterly prostrated ; she had gone through so much wearing anxiety and grief during the past month or two, that a few days' rest was absolutely necessary to recruit her strength before undertaking a journey.

The countess almost chafed herself into a fever at this delay. Indeed, she would have started without her daughter had not her privileged attendant flatly refused to accompany her if Lady Maud was left behind.

The physician made the most of the young lady's indisposition, it is true, as he strongly opposed the countess's journey and warned her that she would in all probability break down before she crossed the channel.

She paid no heed to his warning, however ; her only desire was for change of scene ; her restless mood could only be appeased by constantly moving from one place to another.

At the end of a week Lady Maud was so evidently better that no further excuse could be invented for delaying their departure any longer.

The house was to be shut up and the servants dismissed, except one maid servant who was retained to wait on the house-keeper, who was left in charge of the mansion.

An air of discomfort and desolation already began to pervade

the place and the signs of the coming departure of the family were visible in every room and vestibule.

On the day before their intended departure, Lady Maud drove over to the Chase to take leave of Lady Bertha Chineron. She found her sister-in-law depressed and anxious.

"I am so glad you have come, Maud," were almost the first words she greeted her with. "I am worried and puzzled beyond measure by a communication I have received to-day from the family solicitor—Meldon is always tediously oracular, but this letter is quite beyond my comprehension. It speaks of complications and unforeseen contraventions, and bids me prepare myself to receive unpleasant disclosures shortly, of quite a startling character. Now what on earth can it all mean? and why couldn't Meldon speak out plainly at once, instead of racking my poor weary brain with mystifications of this sort?"

When Lady Maud read the letter at Bertha's request she was equally mystified; but after a little reflection she began to fear that the unpleasant disclosures threatened to be soon made known were in some way connected with her brother's untimely fate and her mother's recent illness.

"Well, what do you make of the letter?" asked Bertha, seeing the pained expression on the other's face.

"I am afraid that in some way the promised revelations will throw some light on the cause of poor George's untimely end," she replied with great emotion.

"May heaven forfend!" exclaimed Bertha, starting up in great excitement. "If he erred he paid the penalty to the extent of his life, and I would rather give up all I possess than have his name held up to scorn. For myself I have wearied my brain through many a sleepless night, vainly endeavouring to fix on some adequate cause for that rash and fearful act, which terminated his life. But tell me, what do you suspect? What do you know?"

"I know of nothing definite," replied Lady Maud with some hesitation, "but I have heard he became entangled in some love affair with—with a person just before he left for India, and that she disappeared soon afterwards and poor George never saw her again until that day on which he raised his hand to take his own life."

Lady Chineron wrung her hands and burst into tears.

"God forgive the high-handed ones who brought about our ill-fated union!" she exclaimed passionately. "Ours was not a love match on either side, but poor George was the kindest and most forbearing of husbands; say what they will, a kinder and truer heart never beat in the human breast than his. He was upright and just in all his dealings and especially thoughtful for the weak and helpless. No, Maud, no, it cannot be that the trial that awaits me comes from the source you dread."

"You are right, Bertha; I never knew him commit an unjust or unkind act in his life; no brother and sister ever regarded each other with more sincere devotion than we did. I hope from my inmost soul that my fears are unfounded——"

"They must be. What can this woman allege against him after the lapse of so many years?" interrupted Bertha passionately. "I for one will never listen to her tale! Do you know, Maud, I feel as though another blow of unkind fate would slay me, I am so utterly heart-broken and desolate. Did you but know what it is to feel desolate and alone in the one great sorrow of your life, as I do, you would pity me."

"I am not free from heartache either," replied the young lady sadly; "and, alas! I also know something of that desolation of spirit which is worse than death itself."

"Then you will listen all the more readily to me, dear Maud, for I must tell out my grief, or my heart will burst with long pent-up anguish. Years ago I loved some one, no matter whom, but my friends interposed, and, although the attachment was mutual, we had to go our different ways in life. Well, when I was free once more we met again. He had never ceased to love me—had remained unmarried for my sake. What, then, more natural than that we should renew the past?"

"He asked me, and I consented to become his wife before the present year ran out.

"We did not think fit to announce our engagement until within a month or two of the day we had fixed for our marriage.

"He knew that his own relatives would approve his choice, and for myself, as I was my own mistress, I decided to turn a deaf ear to any remonstrances or opposition that came from my side of the house.

"I flattered myself that our attachment was unknown to any

one save our own two selves. But that dreadful argus-eyed grandam of mine spied it out, and—oh, can I ever forgive her?—spoke privately to Robert on the subject. She knew well where to strike and to wound him sorely, and she did it so effectually that he declared, much as he loved me, he would never enter any family that looked down on him as a mean, mercenary wretch. And now I am bereaved of my child, threatened with I know not what misfortune, and not one true friend to lean on!”

“Women of our class, I suppose, seldom marry the man of their choice,” said Lady Maud with a sigh and a far-away look in her deep violet eyes. “We must be brave, Bertha, and take life as we find it.”

“Ah, but you, Maud—what can you know of disappointment and heartache? If you loved Norland, you should not have been so hard on him.”

“But suppose I did not love him?”

“Then you were quite right in breaking off the engagement. One can forgive much in the husband of one’s choice—very little in the one chosen for us. I am sorry, Maud, that I have been rather hard on you; but I thought, with Fanny and her husband, that you did it through caprice. You have stood your own bravely, however. Does the countess know it yet?”

“No, I dared not tell her. My life will be none of the most enviable once she is acquainted with that fact. For the present her mind is fixed on one idea; she counts the hours until we leave Chillingwood.”

“She is greatly changed,” said Bertha with some show of kindly feeling; “but her will is as dominant as ever.”

To this Lady Maud made no answer. She would never own to any one that her mother was not perfection. She loved to think of her as her ideal of womanhood. High-handed and proud she certainly was, but truthful and honourable, and quite free from all petty jealousy and meanness.

“Good-bye,” said Bertha with a rush of feeling, when Lady Maud at length rose to take leave. “I feel dreadfully anxious about this journey. What will you do if your mother falls ill amongst strangers?”

“When I think of that my heart fails me, but I hope for the best. We take a trained nurse and three maids with us.”

"God speed you, and good-bye once more," cried Bertha, embracing her. "Heaven alone knows what trials may fall to our lot ere we meet again, dearest Maud."

CHAPTER XLIII.

MRS. TRIMBLY all at once became an object of interest to the "wide, wide world."

She was not to be silenced by the astute and wily Doctor Pounceford, either by civil speeches or proffered bribes. She was determined, in her own homely phrase, "to have the law of him" for her forced incarceration in a mad-house.

And in due course the case of Trimby *v.* Pounceford came on for hearing. Damages were laid at two thousand pounds.

Serjeant Slasher was retained for the plaintiff, whilst the great Balderdash, Q.C., with two junior counsel, came on for the defendant.

Public attention had been called to this action at law before the case came on for hearing by sensational paragraphs in some of the leading dailies, wherein it was stated that startling disclosures were expected about the internal arrangements and the modes of torture practised on patients in some private lunatic asylums, where persons who were perfectly sane were kept in durance at the instigation of designing relatives interested in getting them out of the way.

Never had the stuffy law court been more crowded than on the day when the case of Trimby *v.* Pounceford came on for hearing.

The moment the doors were thrown open well-dressed women rushed in and pushed—nay, even fought—to gain foremost places, just as a crowd might have done at the pit entrance of a theatre on Boxing Night.

Serjeant Slasher opened the case with unwonted eloquence. He appeared to rise to the occasion, as though he had made his client's wrongs his own, and expected damages accordingly. His voice thrilled with emotion when he assured the gentlemen of the jury that his client, who was a woman of irreproachable character, the wife of a respectable man and the mother of growing sons, had been treated with the most shocking and cruel indignity by the minions of the defendant. Had the officers of the law dared to treat a woman arrested for some horrible crime

as these minions had treated his innocent client, the press and the public generally would have condemned their conduct in no measured terms. And yet the defendant wanted to palliate this brutal treatment of a defenceless woman by the plea of mistaken identity. Well, even so, the same fearful treatment would evidently have been inflicted on that other defenceless female had she happened to fall into the clutches of the defendant and his hirelings. Here Serjeant Slasher looked at the sleek, faultlessly-dressed defendant so severely that one would have thought he (the learned serjeant) considered Doctor Pounceford ought, at that moment, to be standing in the dock instead of sitting by his solicitor. "No amount of damages in which the defendant might be cast," he went on, "would be an adequate penalty to pay for the insult and indignity heaped on the head of his innocent client, through his (the defendant's) instrumentality." The learned serjeant then detailed in moving language the sufferings his client had undergone during that fearful drive through the London streets, and her incarceration in a mad-house.

The appearance of Mrs. Trimby in the witness-box caused a flutter of excitement to run through the court.

The plain, straightforward, matter-of-fact way in which she gave her evidence produced a most favourable impression. Quite a thrill of pity was observed to run through the assemblage when she described, in homely English, the way in which she had been decoyed down stairs, thrust into a carriage, gagged to stop her cries, and bound hand and foot to prevent her escape; how every indignity had been put on her by the women who helped to convey her to Doctor Pounceford's establishment, women who did not appear to have any ruth or kindness in their nature, and rather enjoyed the sufferings they inflicted on any helpless creature in their power.

There was no gainsaying her evidence. Truth was apparent in every word she uttered.

The learned Balderdash himself sat down evidently beaten after ten minutes' cross-examination of the plaintiff.

Next day the features of Mrs. Trimby, her complexion, the colour of her hair, the expression of her fearless honest eyes, her dress, even to the tie of her bonnet strings, were accurately described by the reporters of some half-dozen morning papers. And very soon afterwards the pictorial papers were profusely illustrated

with portraits both of the plaintiff and defendant, together with supposed views of the house in Dean Street and Lethal Home for Mental Invalids.

In some papers the plaintiff was represented as a female of the "Mother Gamp" style, with poke bonnet and baggy umbrella ; in others as a tall slim matron, with beauty fringe and the latest fashion in dress.

One of the reporters of the *Uptodate Gazette* had the good fortune to interview Mrs. Trimble as she wended her way homeward through Trafalgar Square.

"Were you greatly troubled during your incarceration," he asked, "about what your husband and family might think, when they found you did not return home as the weary hours wore on?"

"No, sir, it was not of them or myself I thought," replied the noble working English woman ; "I could think of nothing during that long and weary night of my incarceration but the poor unhappy creatures confined within the walls of that fearful prison-house—to me it appeared a living tomb, where poor helpless mortals might easily be thrust by designing hands, to linger out their existence in hopeless misery. How could I think of self with so much unmerited suffering around me? No, sir, I thought of my helpless fellow-prisoners, and pondered how such a state of things could be either 'mended or ended.'"

Here she drew herself up, and raising her eyes heavenward, pointed with her toil-worn hand towards the Clock Tower that loomed out clear and distinct against the sunset sky, and said, with the air of an ancient prophetess, regardless of the gathering crowd, who stared at her with wonder not unmingled with awe: "Think you, sir, that if women sat in yonder House—as sit some day they must—to legislate, they would suffer such a system of cruelty and oppression to exist in this land of boasted freedom? I am but a working woman of the people, yet through me this hideous system has received a blow that shall resound through the length and breadth of the land, and the echo of it shall never cease until every private mad-house in England is levelled in the dust!"

Indeed, Mrs. Trimble appeared from that time forward to be endowed with a wonderful amount of ready eloquence, and made statements enough to her interviewers to fill the pages of a three-volume novel.

In short, the wildest stories were invented concerning the plain matter-of-fact Mrs. Trimble that it was possible for the wildest flights of fancy to conceive.

Her supposed likeness was in every illustrated publication, and her photograph might be found displayed in shop windows, side by side with royalty and ladies of histrionic fame.

The case of Trimble *v.* Pounceford lasted three-and-twenty days, and cost more than as many hundreds in hard cash.

The cross-examination of the defendant alone lasted five days. This was Serjeant Slasher's opportunity; he put him on the mental rack so skilfully that the bland M.D. heartily wished himself locked up in one of his own padded rooms, at the mercy of his surly keepers.

"My client was taken to your Home for Mental Invalids by mistake, you say?" questioned the learned serjeant blandly.

Answer, rather reluctantly given, "Yes."

"Who, then, was the plaintiff taken in mistake for?"

No answer.

Question repeated with emphasis.

"I had rather not reply to that question."

Then followed a long discussion, the judge at length ruling that Doctor Pounceford was bound to answer the question put.

Then came the reluctant admission that Mrs. Trimble had been carried off from Dean Street in mistake for a person called Mathers.

"Pray, was this person you call Mathers married or single?" asked Serjeant Slasher as though some important issue hung on the answer.

"I don't know."

"Will you swear you don't know?"

"I was never told."

"Was she called Mrs. or Miss Mathers?"

"Miss, I think."

"And yet you say you don't know whether she is married or single. Do you consider yours a respectable establishment—first-class in fact?"

"Certainly I do."

"This person called Mathers had a child, had she not?"

"I cannot say."

"You are on your oath, sir; will you swear that you never heard the woman you call Mathers had a daughter?"

"I do not remember hearing it."

"Did not the woman herself tell you so?"

"I did not take any notice of what she said."

"Was the woman you call Mathers insane?"

"Decidedly so."

"Will you swear she needed restraint?"

"Yes."

Then Serjeant Slasher gathered himself up and asked in a voice that thrilled the court:

"Where is that woman and her child now?"

"I do not know," answered the defendant, turning the hue of a winter primrose.

For fully two hours the learned serjeant cross-examined him on this point, but could elicit nothing further of any consequence.

Doctor Pounceford must have been heavily bribed to keep back the name of the person who employed him to carry off Alice from Dean Street to his Home for Mental Invalids, as he evaded the question in the witness-box so persistently as to incur committal to prison for contempt of court.

This episode in the case caused the most sensational rumours to run rife on every side. It was stated by some that the woman called Mathers was the widow of a nobleman, whose friends had conspired to place her in a private lunatic asylum, to gain possession of her child, who was heiress to immense wealth; whilst others declared she was the morganatic widow of a prince, and it was sought to thrust her into a mad-house so as to silence her effectually from making any statement that would tend to injure influential members of the state.

A noted M.P. famous for making political capital out of any event that exercised the mind of the public, jumped up in the House and demanded of the Rt. Hon. the Home Secretary, "If he, the right hon. gentleman, had found the woman called Mathers? and if not, why not?" in a tone and manner that caused an uncontrollable burst of—I am sorry to add—laughter throughout the assembly.

However, as counsel contended for the defendant, that whereas the woman called Mathers was a patient of Doctor Pounceford's, as proved by two eminent medical men who were called in to consult on the case and testified to finding the woman in a high

state of cerebral excitement, he, the defendant, was not bound to divulge the affairs of his own patient or that of her relatives, and all the more so, as the affairs of this apparently mysterious individual had nothing to do with the question at issue, and her name had only crept into the case to show that the plaintiff had been simply taken from Dean Street in mistake, and not deprived of her liberty by malice aforethought.

The point as to whether the defendant was bound or not to answer questions about his patient's private affairs, which were irrelevant to the case before the court, was argued with great forensic skill, for and against, by counsel on both sides. At length, however, it was ruled in defendant's favour, who was at once released from durance, nor was he again put into purgatory, *i. e.*, the witness-box.

Doctor Pounceford had not created a favourable impression on the court from the first. Perhaps it was chiefly owing to this that he was cast in damages to the full amount claimed, with costs. He also incurred the severe censure of the judge, for the manner in which he had given evidence.

Mrs. Trimby, as we have said, found herself famous, but we question whether she found herself considerably the richer through the damages awarded her by an intelligent British jury.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"COMING events cast their shadows before." The shadow that had rested so long on the noble house of Chineron at length assumed shape and form.

Alice at last found friends to advocate her cause and bring forward the claim of herself and child to their rightful position and heritage.

The rage and chagrin of the dowager countess when this fact became known knew no bounds.

She had reached Paris before this intelligence was announced to her, and no sooner had she realized that her secret was now public property than she broke down utterly, and a long and dangerous illness followed.

Her daughter nursed her with the most untiring care and devotion, and perhaps it was owing to this that the countess ever rose again from her sick-bed.

It was the turning-point in the proud, haughty woman's life.

The calm, self-possessed, high-bred woman, whose summer beauty rivalled many a belle in her springtime, had all at once become peevish, impatient and weakly passionate. Bent and wan, her beauty faded like an autumn flower nipped by untimely winter frost; her high ambition dulled or dead, little remained of her former self, except her intense hatred of Alice. No one dared mention that name in her presence, her rage became so terrible.

Her nerves were completely shattered. She started at the slightest sound: would often scream like a frightened child if her chamber door was opened suddenly; shrank with nervous dread from the face of a stranger, and seldom cared to see a friend.

Her countenance always wore an anxious, troubled look; her sleep went from her, sometimes for nights together.

The most eminent physicians were consulted in vain. It was the old story over again—"they could not minister to a mind diseased, nor ease the troubled breast."

Not all the combined skill of the *materia medica* could restore the banished sleep to her weary, aching eyelids whilst her bosom was racked with such an array of conflicting passions.

The utter failure of her well-planned schemes to deprive Alice of her rightful position as the wife of her son—the certainty that this hated "creature" would some day reign at Chillingwood in her stead—was far more bitter than gall and wormwood to her proud spirit.

The sting of complete failure, entailing disgrace and misery on all concerned, added to the deep distress and mortification of Bertha, whom she had wilfully drawn into the pitfall, greatly augmented her disquiet.

Not that Bertha ever knew to what extent the dowager countess had knowingly laid this pitfall for her unwary feet. Nothing that Alice averred was ever taken the slightest notice of by any member of the family. Alice was, in fact, the scapegoat; it was on her shoulders that all the blame and odium was laid.

Indeed, one could scarce tell whether Bertha or the countess received the most sympathy and condolence over this terrible misfortune, which had fallen like a thunderbolt on two noble houses.

The countess was pitied and consoled with on all sides. It was heart-crushing, they declared, to have such an intriguing, low-born creature acknowledged as the widow of her lost son. The dowager countess's set could find no name opprobrious.

enough for that *unprincipled usurper*, as they termed Alice—a woman who was considered quite beyond the pale of society. Not one of the upper ten would have remained in the same room with her for an instant.

Not but that the dowager's dearest friends did not shake their heads in private, and declare the whole affair was dreadfully shocking and mysterious ; but even her enemies did not give her credit for the temerity of ignoring the fact of her son's marriage with Alice, and eventually casting forth both wife and child as utter aliens into the world's wide wilderness.

True, her daughter Maud knew something of the part she had played in this painful affair, but it was not for her to denounce her own mother and take Alice by the hand as a woman more sinned against than sinning.

Of one thing alone Lady Maud was truly glad, and that was that she had broken off her engagement with the Duke of Norland before this family scandal had become known to the world.

Her pride would have been wounded to the quick to be looked down on by that haughty patrician as no longer worthy an alliance with his high and noble self.

Bertha turned all her anger and dislike against Alice. She it was who had brought misfortune and disgrace on two noble families, and in her (Bertha's) opinion the deepest dungeon of the Inquisition was the only fit place for the creature who claimed to be the widow of the late earl.

She never would allow that Lord Chineron was to blame for the deception practised on herself. He had married her in all good faith, believing that his first wife died whilst he was in India. And this vile woman, for some fell purpose of her own, had concealed herself from his knowledge until her evil machinations were complete. Then she reappeared on the scene, and hastened her victim to his doom.

This was Bertha's declared view of the matter, and it was sore against her will that the claimant was allowed to establish her claim without a far more strenuous opposition.

If she believed that the dowager countess was to blame for the disappearance of Alice, and that she had concocted the tale of her death to deceive her son, she kept her own counsel. Perhaps she considered it more fitting that the detested usurper of her own rights should bear all the blame and odium.

She kept up a continual correspondence with Lady Maud, and it was a great relief to this young lady's mind when at length she found Bertha's letters assuming a more hopeful view of life. At first, after the blow fell, her letters breathed nothing but despair and desolation. She talked of becoming a convert to the Romish faith and retiring into a convent, that she might pass her future life far, "far from the madding crowd." She was tired of the world, and declared she would welcome even death itself as a release from the mental anguish she endured.

It did not, therefore, come as a surprise to Lady Maud when she learnt, soon after Bertha's letters assumed a more cheerful tone, that she had become engaged to Robert Cavot, and that they were to be married, very quietly, at no distant date.

"Robert has behaved most nobly," she wrote. "He came to me as soon as he heard of the fearful calamity which had overtaken me, saying that no one now would be able to accuse him of interested motives in offering me his hand. It will save me from endless annoyance to shelter myself under my husband's name, and possibly in time my past painful history will be forgotten.

"My haughty grandam now consents to receive Robert's visits; and as I am like the heroine of Wilkie Collins' novel of 'No Name,' she has graciously given her consent to our union."

Lady Maud herself sorely needed comfort at this time, and to know that Bertha's life had not been utterly wrecked by the machinations of others was an untold relief to her mind, although her mother took very little heed concerning Bertha's future. She appeared wholly occupied in chafing over her own defeated ambitious aims, and the triumph of the woman she had injured and despised.

She declared it was her intention to take up her residence on the continent; she would never again return to Chillingwood whilst the Chase was dishonoured by the presence of that creature, a term she always used when speaking of Alice.

When she was strong enough to travel she left Paris for Rome, where she decided on remaining some time. She had sent on before to hire a mansion, or rather a palace, in the Piazza di Spagna, as she disliked staying at an hotel.

Once settled down in the Palazzo Caracci, the life of Lady Maud became lonely and monotonous in the extreme.

The dowager countess for the most part kept to her own suite of rooms, where she often remained for days together, only appearing at their late dinner in a *salon* which immediately adjoined her own boudoir.

Sometimes the dinner was eaten in silence. The countess appeared to have lost all interest in what was passing in the city in which she had taken up her abode.

She declared herself too much of an invalid to go out into society, and declined to receive at home once a week, as her friends urged her to do.

Lady Maud dared not complain of the loneliness and seclusion in which her mother elected to live, as whenever she did venture on this vexed topic, she was reminded that she had been warned in time of the life she would have to live, if she was self-willed enough to break off her engagement with the Duke of Norland.

No existence could well be more dreary than that of Lady Maud's at that time. She was too young to appear in society without a chaperon, so her evenings were mostly spent in a great dreary saloon, which seemed to echo her every movement, without a creature to speak with.

She was completely thrown back on herself, for although she did not care for a constant round of dinners, balls and concerts, yet she was quite too young to give up going into society without regret.

It was her evenings that she found the most unendurable. During the early part of the day she could go out for a walk, attended by her maid, but when the dinner-hour drew nigh and the shades of evening fell, it seemed as though a pall of black brooding despair fell with it.

She sometimes chafed with bitter impatience at the seclusion her mother condemned her to live in. There were plenty of people that winter residing in Rome who would gladly have welcomed the lovely English girl and her proud patrician mother to their receptions, but, as we have said, the countess refused to visit, or receive visitors, and Lady Maud found herself almost as solitary as though they had taken up their abode in some trackless forest.

One evening she sat at an open window just to catch a glimpse of the busy life without. The motley moving crowd amused her for awhile so much that she stepped out on the balcony to get a

better view of it. She had not been there many minutes when a figure caught her eye that made her heart bound ; she made a step forward and leant over the balustrade.

Yes ! her eyes had not deceived her—it was Alex, looking pale and thin, but just as erect and manly as of yore.

She waited until he was within hearing, then, without pausing to reflect, she pronounced his name in a clear distinct voice, that caught his ear at once.

He looked up.

Oh, the sudden light that leaped into his eyes—the glad expression that overspread his handsome features—she had no need to ask if her presence was a welcome one.

In a few moments his footsteps were heard resounding through the long stone corridor.

She flew to the door of the saloon and opened it.

Ah, well, as the stately groom of the chambers did not think fit to remain and witness the welcome that followed, we do not intend to behave like another Paul Pry, and let the world know how these lovers greeted one another.

For lovers they still were, spite of all that had come between them.

But lest some strong-minded person of either sex should consider Alex Cameron rather weakly forgiving to condone the past on the instant, without a little preliminary scene of tears and explanations, we had better state at once that Alex met Lady Hardbend in London shortly after his return to England from the Cape, and that she, in a confidential way, related in what manner her sister had broken off her engagement with Norland : with many other circumstances that plainly told Alex Lady Maud had never ceased to care for him ; and that when she accepted the attentions of the duke, she had done so at the instigations of her high-handed mother rather than in fickleness and bad faith.

He no sooner felt satisfied of this than he took the earliest opportunity of repairing to Rome, with the result we have seen.

“And to think that I mourned you as dead for months,” said Lady Maud, when the first greetings were over. “Oh, the dreary heartache of that time no words can describe ; but tell me, was it true that you were stricken down with that dreadful fever and given over as one past hope?”

"I was certainly knocked over for a time, but a young fellow of our company, who was a clever doctor, although he failed to succeed in his profession at home, eventually pulled me through, and when I was strong enough insisted on my making for the coast without delay. We found on the company's claim riches beyond the dreams of avarice; but the climate is so deadly, where this wealth of gold and diamonds can be found, that few Englishmen can live in it: more than half of our people perished, and the rest had a hard fight to reach the coast alive. However, we succeeded in bringing with us a few hundredweights of gold dust, and the diamonds I myself placed in the hands of the company's secretary, on my arrival in England, must have been worth several thousand pounds."

"And the baron—is he as much sought after as formerly?" asked Lady Maud in the course of conversation.

"Well, that I hardly know," answered Alex reflectively. "I found him just as debonair and seemingly prosperous as ever. 'Tis said in the City that he is worth millions, but then one never knows how these great financiers stand. Of the score of companies he has floated, one third have already drifted into the Insolvent Court, and the others seem likely to follow in due course. Whether he will come down with a crash, some day, or retire on his gains to his ancestral castle, which he sometimes boasts of in his confiding moments, time alone will reveal."

"But enough of this! Let us talk of what concerns ourselves more nearly. I may seek an interview with your mother in the morning, may I not, dearest Maud?" Then seeing her blush and hesitate, he added a little maliciously: "Must I still wait for a more convenient season, as of old?"

The dowager countess did not receive Alex's proposal for her daughter's hand very graciously.

It was her way to dislike any one who dared to thwart her will, and Alex had thwarted her schemes more than once; she would much rather that he had succumbed to the fever he caught in Africa than return home to marry her daughter Maud.

Still, she did not refuse her consent, for the reason that even her society had become distasteful to her. Her haughty spirit chafed under the consciousness that her crown of perfection had fallen from her brow before her daughter's eyes, and that hence-

forth she would never regard her with reverence, nor obey her will with a child's unquestioning faith.

Had the countess lived in the olden time she would have endowed a convent and have become the abbess, from a mere love of absolute rule. As it was she elected to pass her days in solitary state, eating her heart out with the bitterness of vain regret.

* * * *

In course of time Alice formally established her claim, and was shortly afterwards installed as mistress of the Chase and appointed guardian of her daughter, who became the acknowledged heiress of the late Earl of Chineron's property. Not that the claim Alice put forward was decided without an immense amount of legal procedure; the question at issue was far too momentous to be dealt with by the court without due inquiry into facts, and mature deliberation on the part of the judges appointed to decide on the merits of the case.

Had the affair happened before the Chancery reform, Bertha and the dowager countess would have thrown the case into Chancery, and there, doubtless, it would have remained until Alice and her daughter had died of poverty, if not old age.

Alice, it is true, would have gloried in having the case tried in open court; she longed to expose the machinations of the dowager countess before the world.

It was not enough to satisfy her revenge that she triumphed over her enemy in establishing her claim; she desired above all things to banish the proud, haughty dame from the great world of fashion where she had queened it so long.

Alice knew quite enough of that exclusive world to be aware that she herself would never be permitted to enter it. The door of the inner-circle would never be opened to her; she must for ever remain beyond the pale of society, as represented by the high-born few.

She had retired to a quiet seaside village in Devonshire soon after that affair in Dean Street. Her uncle, Mr. Merryman, dreaded lest the dowager countess or her satellites should gain possession of Alfreda before she could be made a ward in Chancery, when her abduction would prove a case of felony and attended with too much danger to be attempted with impunity.

Alfreda had narrowly escaped being kidnapped when her mother, by the merest chance, evaded the terrible fate of being carried off by fraud and force to a madhouse.

Had Alice been carried off, instead of Mrs. Trimble, poor Freda would have been left to her fate, and the secret of her birth would have remained with her mother in her prison-house, perhaps for aye.

Was it chance or Providence that watched over this poor persecuted woman and her child? Well, it was doubtless Providence.

The wicked plot, and their plots appear to prosper up to a certain point; then some apparently feeble instrument, like the mouse in the fable, gnaws at the network and the lion comes forth in his strength.

To the town-bred Alfreda that seaside village in Devonshire was a place of "wonderland."

What untold treasures she found along the rocky coast, what delicate branches of seaweed, what stores of shells and shining pebbles, beside the hundred and one marine delights that even children of larger growth find pleasure in gathering up by the ocean shore.

Indeed it is well when poor weary worldlings, full of the good things of this life, can become as little children once more and find pleasure in such simple amusements.

At least this childlike simplicity never came to Alice; she sat moody and apart, gazing into space, brooding, for ever brooding, over her wasted past, or planning some scheme whereby she might humble her proud, implacable adversary, once she found herself mistress of the Chase.

She was so embittered by wrong and privation that even prosperity could neither render her amiable nor cheerful; she appeared to grow harder and less forgiving, when, at length, she found herself in a position to assume her rightful name and station before the world.

It was her misfortune, rather than her fault, to repel those whom she would have most gladly attracted towards her. She did not even win the affections of her child, as she might have done, by some little show of gentle tenderness. Yet she loved her with that strong concentrated love such as only a lone-hearted, slighted woman can feel for her only child.

There are many repellent, reticent women around us, in the world, with warm affections and hearts as true as steel, but we fail to reach the kernel, because we will not take the trouble to break through the hard rough shell.

Yet if the gay, and the great, and the rich held aloof, the sad, and the sick, and the poor blessed Alice, the Countess of Chineron, and welcomed her presence with more love and reverence than is often accorded to those in high station.

Freda was soon simply adored by every cottager within five miles of the Chase; she often accompanied her mother on her errands of mercy, her sweet sunny face lighting up many an abode of sorrow and suffering.

Alice gave with open-handed charity; she had learnt to pity the struggling poor in the school of suffering. No one, in the time of her prosperity, was ever known to seek her aid in vain.

As soon as she took up her abode at the Chase, she offered her uncle, Horace Merryman, a home beneath her roof.

This, however, he declined; the grandeur of the mansion and the staff of liveried menials awed him; he much preferred his stool at the office desk, and his humble lodgings with the genteel Mrs. Limber.

Neither did Alice forget her former friends. She offered David Trimble the under-stewardship of the home estate, with a good dwelling house near the mansion. This offer Trimble and his wife accepted gladly; they were overjoyed at the prospect of settling down so near the child of their adoption.

They were not long in taking possession of their new abode, much to the joy of Freda, who never found herself more happy than when her dear old mammy—as she still called Mrs. Trimble—came over to the grand nursery at the Chase and sang her to sleep with some simple nursery ballad, or told her a fairy tale in the gloaming, as she used to do in the old days, in that dingy upper chamber in Elm Court.

Alfreda is too young and artless, as yet, to understand the full value of high birth and unbounded wealth; in after years she may learn to estimate both at their full value, but we trust that nothing will ever possess the power to change her loving, gentle, trustful nature.

THE END.

Charles Reade.

By ELSIE RHODES.

PART I.

Of all professions perhaps none has been more bitterly attacked than that of the critic. Some people have even said that it is a useless one, and he who engages in it deficient in conscience, in talent and in justice.

Out of all this abuse, however, has come a very genuine advantage. We are learning to define the ideal of criticism. We are waking up to the realization that the business of the critic is not, primarily, to pick out failures and mistakes, or successes and excellences; neither is it to blame or praise; still less to compare one great author with another and ask such questions as "Could Dante Rossetti write sonnets as well as Shakespeare?" "Was Browning as great a poet as Tennyson?"; least of all to presume to say, "This man is right, the other wrong."

It is to study carefully if he may discover the special distinctive feature of the author, and show *that* to the world, that those for whom the poem or book has been written, those, namely, who are so constituted that they can come into touch with such an author, may recognize their own and rejoice.

As a first step towards appreciating the works of Charles Reade it is well to gain as clear an idea as possible of the man as he showed himself to those who knew him, lived with him, loved him.

Why do we fear the partiality of friendly biographers? It is impossible to study a human heart from the outside, and if we would understand one with whom we cannot come into personal contact, our best chance lies in entering with the "side-door key" of his intimate friend.

Charles Reade was born at Ipsden in June, 1814. He was the youngest of nine children, seven boys and two girls.

His father was a fine old English gentleman; fond of hunting and all manly sports; somewhat blustering, choleric and obstinate, but a good husband and father. From him Charles inherited

his tall stature, his handsome face and his abounding sense of humour; perhaps also his pugnacity and quick temper.

His mother had been much at court before her marriage. She was a distinguished woman in many respects, and the briefest of sketches of Charles which ignored her must be glaringly incomplete.

She was a brilliant conversationalist and wit. She had an almost superabundant vitality and vivacity. Her household arrangements went like clockwork. Haydn trained her musical talent, and her natural wit was sharpened by a friendship with Sheridan. Her society was eagerly sought by many of the greatest men of the early part of our century. However, she came under the influence of Mr. Fox, an evangelical preacher; and, though her house was as popular as ever, the character of its visitors was changed. Thereafter Ipsden Hall was rarely without a clergyman of the evangelical type.

In her treatment of her children Mrs. Reade was alternately severe and indulgent. Expressions of affection were very rare; so rare, indeed, that many thought her a hard woman. But that there was in her a strong undercurrent of tenderness became more evident as years went on. She was bigoted, capricious, and somewhat of a domestic tyrant; but with all her faults she was a true-hearted, earnest, always remarkable woman, and Charles was her favourite son.

"Give us the charge of a child until he is seven, and any one may have him after," say the Jesuits, so much importance do they attach to early influences. For three years (1818-21) the boy was entirely in the charge of his sister Julia. In those years was laid the foundation of whatever excellence he afterwards attained.

Julia was a rarely beautiful personality; beautiful in mind and body alike. Wonderfully gifted, persevering, with a real aptitude for teaching, possessing the disposition, as we say, "of an angel," and moreover loving her little brother passionately, she taught and trained him, was his most constant companion, his one friend. She taught him to despise mediocrity in any and every shape, and awoke in him the ambition to excel in everything he attempted: incited him to study, and led him on with such steadiness that he loved it: even if he had not, he so adored Julia that he would have done anything for her. She also

developed in him an extraordinary power of minute observation—a quality which stood him in good stead in the business of his life.

But Julia was too lovely, too *spirituelle*, too altogether attractive to stay under the parental roof. When she married, Charles was sent to school.

Over this, unquestionably the most painful portion of his life, there is no temptation to linger. Caned and birched in a revoltingly cruel manner and with daily frequency, it is a wonder that the sensitive, proud little fellow came out of his four years' slavery there with any intelligence at all. Suffice it to say that the hateful character of Hawes in "It is Never Too Late to Mend" is an exact portrait of his first schoolmaster.

His second, Mr. Hearn, of Staines, was all that the first was not. He *educated* his pupils and looked after their bodily no less than their mental health. He had hard work to undo the harm done by his predecessor, but, thanks to his sympathy, kindness, perseverance and policy of non-restraint, Charles's love of learning came to life again. At thirteen he was healthy, graceful, agile and attractive, the sullen endurance gone from his face and replaced by vivacity and interest.

Two things are of import in connection with these years.

His dramatic talent was developing. Power of appreciating a "situation," intuitive perception of the one thing to be done, quick adaptability to circumstances, absolute control over his facial expression: these are *en evidence* in many a school-boy prank.

And his literary talent was discovered by Mr. Hearn. Himself a master of the English language, he was a most unsparing critic of the work of his pupils, and took endless pains to teach them terseness, clearness, exactness of expression. It would be difficult to over-estimate the service he thus rendered the future author.

In due time Charles became Demy of Magdalen College.

The dull routine and strict etiquette of the most exclusive of the Oxford colleges was not at all to the taste of this born Bohemian. There, conformity to a cloistral ideal was the one aim of life; he "cared for none of these things," and absented himself as much as possible from the men's society both at dinner and in the common-room. Anything like individuality was

strenuously disapproved there, and as Reade *bristled* with it he felt he was unwelcome, and kept to himself more and more, reading voraciously, playing the violin, dancing the double-shuffle, and exercising his powers as an actor by practising parts before a large mirror. So determined was he to preserve independence in life and thought that he even wore his hair longer than any other Demy, and dressed in clothes of strange cut and colour.

Being a younger son he was not rich, and in spite of his mother's generosity could not afford to lose his chance of a Fellowship. But he neglected lectures as much as he dared, only followed the prescribed course of reading so far as he was obliged, and spent the greater part of his time in the Oxford libraries reading "to please himself," *i.e.*, books of all centuries, all countries, and of all kinds.

After gaining his fellowship he had to choose between the Church and the Bar, and in 1836 took up his residence in Lincoln's Inn.

The dry verbosity and red-tapism were naturally hateful to him. Here was a man brimming over with life and health and human nature; burning to distinguish himself; hungering for sympathy; his head full of the drama, his heart of intense and growing interest in his kind—and he was set to read the works of Dry-as-Dust week in week out in Lincoln's Inn!

One is not surprised to learn that he dropped it entirely from about 1837-1842.

In vacation he walked a great deal, both in England and Scotland, and preferred this mode of travelling to any other. He was also apt to make sudden resolutions, and that he might start from Ipsden or London at literally a moment's notice, he kept complete suits of clothes at both houses.

One summer he spent between Paris, Geneva and the Rhine. Mrs. Reade provided the funds for the tour. Though there was much in Charles that crossed her strong evangelical prejudices—for Ipsden society had disgusted him with ecclesiasticism and he had greatly scandalized the whole household by seizing his violin one night and, to a highly spirited accompaniment, dancing the double-shuffle on the polished oval drawing-room table—he was to the last her favourite son, and there was always more sympathy between them than between Charles and his father.

During this tour he wrote charming letters to her. No

individual or characteristic trait of the people or countries he visited ever escaped him.

After another year's enforced residence in college, occasioned by his becoming Dean of Arts, he rented rooms in Leicester Square. His extreme fondness for animals must have made him a troublesome lodger, for he kept numerous pets, and valued his window curtains chiefly on account of the shelter and amusement they afforded to his squirrels.

Not infrequently he disguised himself and studied low life. Many an odd character he discovered in this way. He was far too sensitive for his own happiness, and when among conventional people, or those who treated him with suspicion or coldness, nothing could be more icily calm and indifferent than his manner, more impenetrable than his expression. On the other hand, freed from such restraints and face to face with genuine human nature, his wealth of tenderness and power of sympathy drew the hearts of men and women towards him, and he saw into their very souls.

At 45 years of age Charles Reade was a perfect gentleman: handsome, with distinguished manners, and an almost ridiculously youthful appearance. He was adored by juveniles, preferred women's society to men's, and became at once the centre of any circle into which he chanced to come.

He did not marry, probably for pecuniary reasons; but "Margaret Brandt" was drawn by the hand of a 'lover.'

At this comparatively late period of his life, with health and faculties unimpaired, rich in experience, possessing extraordinary stores of observation, and as full of the zest of life at fifty as he had been at thirty, he began his life work.

He commenced writing. Not novels. The drama was his first, and to the last, his chief love. He wrote eighteen plays and several short articles, and for three years not a single MS. was accepted by either manager or editor! Such a bitter record of failure, though not for a day did it discourage, aged and somewhat soured him. He was not mercenary, and though the money which his toil should have brought him would have been very welcome, he felt far more keenly the utter want of sympathy in his life.

At last, however, he was permitted to read part of a play to a leading actress at the Haymarket. Mrs. Laura Seymour was a

clever—more, an intellectual—woman, very brave, and, above all, large-hearted. She was not a "great" actress: talent and intelligence and intense love of her art could not quite supply the place of genius; but she proved the good angel of Charles Reade, although in their first interview she wounded him. After expressing approval of the dramatic situations, she turned on him quickly with:

"But why don't you write novels?"

Now what is more aggravating than to receive such a broad hint that we are more suited to work which seems to us of a lower order than to this in which lies our whole heart and which we feel we are born to do?

"Another misunderstanding," he thought bitterly, and left abruptly. Mrs. Seymour, thinking his sadness arose from want of money, sent him a very kind and sympathetic note accompanied by £5. This brought my lord to her very quickly to return the money and to thank her for the other far more valuable gift.

Thenceforth she was his truest, dearest friend. She and her husband and Charles Reade occupied the same house, and until the day of her death she superintended his household affairs.

This friendship marked the beginning of his literary career. Thereafter he wrote unceasingly. "Never a day without a line" was his motto, and he lived up to it. The story of his later life was very little more than the story of his works.

He was in the midst of writing "Hard Cash" when Mrs. Reade died. He does not say much about it—he felt too deeply; but the letter telling Laura Seymour of her death is blotted with his tears.

Two qualities laid him open to considerable suffering: his extreme sensitiveness and his passionate love of justice. This latter made him an easy prey to designing people and led him into much expense and some odd situations. His incorrigible taste for theatrical speculation plunged him more than once into great pecuniary difficulties. There came a time, however, when his financial troubles were over, and then he and Mrs. Seymour went to a house at Albert Gate. They had each their own circle of friends, who came and went freely. Between the years 1850-74, he was acquainted more or less intimately with Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, James Rice, Edwin Arnold, Wilberforce,

Robert Buchanan, Victor Hugo, Bulwer-Lytton, Thackeray and Miss Hogarth, Mrs. Oliphant, Rhoda Broughton, Mrs. Bancroft, Kate and Ellen Terry, Mrs. Kendal, Irving, Toole, Wilson Barrett and many others of note—not least his collaborateur, Dion Boucicault.

It was wonderful how much he retained of the freshness and sprightliness of boyhood. He always had a very deep sympathy with every real experience of life, in child or man. He had much in common with his favourite *Doctor Amboyne** and certainly possessed to a peculiar degree that gentleman's capacity for putting himself in the place of others.

At sixty-two, he was in heart and manner still comparatively young. But in 1878, Mrs. Seymour's health, which had been somewhat uncertain for a long time, failed entirely, and in '79 she died.

The strongest love of his life had been centred on this woman, and when she died his own life left nearly him. It seemed as though he *could not* look up again and go on living in a world where there was no Laura to welcome him, to look into his eyes with understanding, to cheer him with her own bright spirit. Only those of his relations who were with him during those awful weeks knew approximately what he passed through. He did recover to a certain extent, but his heart's action remained irregular.

Further residence in the Albert Gate house was impossible to him, and he and his brother Compton rented two semi-detached villas near London. Gradually some amount of interest in life returned to the broken-hearted author. He was carefully tended by nephews and nieces, and his old love for animals reawoke in him: he had quite a little colony of Belgian hares running fearlessly about the lawn and fraternizing with a pair of toy-terriers.

In the summer of 1881, there was a grand family gathering in the old hall at Ipsden, on the occasion of Henry becoming the head of the family. Charles Reade was there; a fine venerable-looking figure, with his long white beard and hair. He seemed to many quite to have got over the shock of Mrs. Seymour's death, and some even prophesied that he would live to old age. He actually played a game of tennis.

* In "Put Yourself in His Place."

But the excitement attendant on the production of a drama, "Love and Money"—the first literary effort since his loss, and made sorely against the grain—brought back irritability, loss of sleep and many unfavourable symptoms.

To escape the English fogs he went to Cannes, but grew slowly worse, and when his brother Henry died suddenly, the fresh shock completely prostrated him. He was literally brought home to die.

On Good Friday, 1884, Charles Reade, "dramatist, novelist, journalist," passed away.

PART II.

THE works of Charles Reade have been so far put on one side. They demand separate consideration.

They differ widely in style and purpose. If "Christie Johnstone" and "Put Yourself in His Place" were read together and without knowledge of the author's name, it would be difficult to think of them as children of the same brain.

Yet the hall-mark, as it were, is there in the essentially dramatic treatment of the subjects. In all, from "The Cloister and the Hearth" and "Peg Woffington" to "Singleheart and Doubleface" and "A Double Marriage," there is the hand of the dramatist in plot, character and situation. Indeed to such an extent was this bent followed that it has even damaged some of his work in the eyes of at least one famous critic.

In a prologue to a rustic story Reade wrote: "Pen in hand I am fond of hot passions and pictorial incidents, and, like the historians, care too little for the 'middle of humanity;'" and no one can read his books without recognizing the justice of at least the first part of this remark.

It is possible to roughly classify his books.

"Peg Woffington," "Christie Johnstone," "The Wandering Heir," and one or two others are not only dramatic in treatment but also in form. Action, action, all through. A series of moving pictures with not a word of explanation beyond what is needful to indicate the scene. The characters reveal themselves as in life by acting, speaking and *looking*; the dialogue is terse, sparkling, stimulating.

You are planted in the very atmosphere of the scenes. In "Peg Woffington" you feel all the artificial splendour and illusion

of stage life ; in "Christie Johnstone" you catch the glinting of the sunlight on the silver fish and hear the rough shouts of the Newhaven men hauling in the nets.

Charles Reade wished to be thought, and considered himself primarily, a dramatist. He *saw* every incident from a dramatic point of view. His puppets verily played their part on a stage : and every grouping of them, every motion, every word spoken by them was studied. He knew the position, the expression, the tone, the very light needful to bring out the greatest amount of meaning, and he has transferred this visual creation almost entire to his novels in a way that few have done at all and none quite on his ground.

The success of that magnificent trio, "It is Never Too Late to Mend," "Hard Cash," "Put Yourself in His Place," is a standing refutation of the arguments of those who carp at "novels with a purpose."

"I will make people feel," he said. "They read of an occasional outrage in asylum or prison, say 'how shocking,' and forget all about it. I will bring it home to them : they shall *feel* : they shall see how these facts may touch them individually."

And he took firm hold of the facts—prison cruelties, inadequacy of lunacy laws, the brutal and intolerably selfish elements that exist in trade unions, made them integral parts of the stories, and so brought home to the vast novel-reading public the things that were being done in secret.

Of course there is a danger in such novels that the details should be uninteresting : that the story be cut to fit a theory : that the characters be dominated by a system, and undue prominence be given to one influence ; but Reade has fallen into none of these errors. His books show life as he has seen it, as he sees it might affect certain people ; and in choosing those situations where the evil effects could be most clearly seen and above all *felt* by the public he has but given evidence of his own consummate art.

Life as he has seen it. There lies another secret of his power. He never wrote of anything from hearsay. He would spend weeks, months, travelling, watching, classifying facts. If he could see for himself he would, no matter what it cost him. If this were impossible he would get hold of some one who *had* seen, and learn what he wanted to know direct from their lips. The

pirate's chase in "Hard Cash," the hopes and fears, the perils, the descriptions of the gold-diggings in "It is Never Too Late to Mend," were learnt in this way. Of the painful details of prison, asylum, and trades unions cruelties he had been an eye-witness.

Those three books form a class quite distinct from the purely dramatic. "A Woman Hater" should perhaps be included, as it contains the history of Rhoda Gale, and is therefore a cry against injustice, though in other respects it comes far behind them.

"A Perilous Secret," "Love me Little, Love me Long," "A Double Marriage," and "A Terrible Temptation," are all of one stamp, though here, again, the last is some way behind the others in merit; and a fourth class is made by "The Autobiography of a Thief," "Good Stories of Men and Animals" and "The Course of True Love Never did run Smooth."

Two books stand alone:

"The Cloister and the Hearth" and "Griffith Gaunt."

The first has become a standard work. As a study of the customs of the 15th century in Holland, Germany, France and Italy, it is unsurpassed, perhaps untouched. The powerful grip Reade has of his subject, the way in which he has seen all with the "inner eye," the divorce he has effected between his work and his own century and conditions of life, so that when you read the book, you are living in *Gerard's* times and in the thought of his day and country; all these, with his dramatic force and his consummate insight into human nature, have combined in the building up of this masterpiece. As long as novels are read, Charles Reade will be known as the author of "The Cloister and the Hearth."

The publication of "Griffith Gaunt" was the culminating point in his literary career. The book elicited more abuse than any other of his. Everything that spite and calumny, envy and prudery could invent was showered on him; one result was a run on the book, which paid his debts and left him a handsome sum, freeing him for the rest of his life from money difficulties. The utter injustice of the attack roused his indignation, and a considerable correspondence was conducted through the press; but he was greatly soothed and pleased by a letter of appreciation and warm sympathy which he received from Sir Edwin Arnold.

It is impossible in a short paper to attempt anything like a criticism of his books. As so much has been written lately on the methods of writing fiction, a few words on that of Charles Reade may be interesting.

His commonplace-books are renowned. Therein he noted everything that could possibly be useful to him, whether the details were of scenery, conversation, sentiment, character, situation or event. One bulky volume he read when studying for "Hard Cash" was so ill-arranged that he cut it up, pasting the cuttings all over a large screen, arranging them to suit himself.

He never wrote for less than five hours a day; and never worked on Sundays, no matter how pressed for time.

"When the ardour of research is on, the ardour of writing is extinct," he wrote to Laura Seymour, and at those times he almost lived in the Oxford libraries. Twice he confesses to being moved to tears over scenes in his books. Once he writes in doubt of the plot of "The Cloister and The Hearth," but says: "There shall be great and tremendous and tender things in it!" and was he not capable of carrying out his resolve?

He had many difficulties with publishers; many battles to fight for the copyright of his plays; many bitter, cruel attacks to endure from critics; this is the spirit in which he answered:

"A man who steps out of the beaten track in every way as I do, must expect greater difficulties than other people. The question whether I can overcome them or not is not yet settled. When I produce another 'It is Never Too Late to Mend,' and cabal succeed in burking it, then I will give in. Not before."

The judgments (*sic*) of newspaper reviewers are a by-word for absurdity, and have not much improved since his day. They denounced "It is Never Too Late to Mend," as "verging on the confines of farce;" but reserved for to-day the discriminating statement, "this book must be read to be understood!"

Charles Reade, however, was his own severest critic. He knew well what was good in his work and did not despair, though "Sera Nunquam" (the drama on which was founded "It is Never Too Late to Mend") failed for seven years to gain a hearing on any stage; he also knew what was bad, and cut out remorselessly any passage that offended his taste or that failed in truth.

Once he wrote, "Wait till I get to London and organize a

little society of painters, actors, and writers, all lovers of truth, and sworn to stand or fall together. Why not a Truth Company as well as a Gala Company?—*l'un vaut bien que l'autre*. There is, I believe, a company and a steam engine for everything except truth."

This principle he advocates on behalf of acting in "Peg Woffington," of painting in "Christie Johnstone," of music in several books; and himself exemplifies it in literature.

Of trades-unions he wrote: "If you want a grain of humanity, or honour, or justice, or manly feeling of any kind, don't go to a trades-union." Though the words are strong their truth was certainly borne out by what he had seen and known of their working in his own day in the north. "Put Yourself in His Place" was his last great novel. The pen that had drawn *Francis Eden* had lost none of its power and charm, deep sympathy and delightful humour when it drew *Dr. Amboyne*.

Reade's women have a family likeness, though in what it consists it is difficult to say. They are the best that is implied in the word "feminine:" refined, pure-hearted, gentle, graceful, soft and generally also slightly *piquante*. Feminine caprice, waywardness, inconsistency between feeling and speech, unexpected nobility side by side with unsuspected pettiness—all this he has caught and transferred to paper with wonderful insight, humour and tenderness.

By far the greater number of his novels appeared on the stage as dramas.

"Spoken words are signs of thought, written words are signs of such signs," he wrote, and the exceeding naturalness of the dialogue is no doubt in great measure the direct outcome of his desire for the test of actual utterance. The numerous short tales which, under the title of "Good Stories of Men and Animals," he from time to time contributed to "Belgravia," will all bear being read aloud. Of how small a proportion of the generality of tales can this be said!

If one had space one would like to transcribe several passages from his less-known writings. The following four, are, however, of peculiar interest, and may be quoted at length.

The first was written when the attack on "Sera Nunquam" was hottest.

"Prejudice is a giant, against whom truth and humanity need

to be defended with great spirit, and in some desperate cases with a tiger-like ferocity." . . . Again :

"I feign probabilities ; I record improbabilities : the former are conjectures, the latter truths : mixed they make a thing not so true as gospel nor so false as history : viz., fiction."

The next, from "A Terrible Temptation," recalls his sister Julia and her care of "Charley :

"Compton . . . never knew the thorns with which the path of letters is oft bestrewn. A mistress of the great art of pleasing made knowledge from the first a primrose path to him. Sparkling all over with intelligence she impregnated her boy with it. She made herself his favourite companion ; she would not keep her distance. She stole and coaxed knowledge and goodness into his heart and mind with rare and loving cunning."

In this last we know to whom he paid tribute :

"A story ought to end with a marriage : ought it not ? Well, this one does not, because there are reasons which compel the author to tell the truth. The poet did not marry the actress and beget tragedies and comedies. Love doesn't always end in marriage even behind the scenes of a theatre. But it led to a result the value of which my old writers know and my young ones will learn—it led to a very tender and life-long friendship. And oh ! how few out of the great aggregate of love affairs lead to so high, or so good, or so affectionate a permanency as is a tender friendship."

The actor, Henry Neville, asserted that Charles Reade's pen issued "words of fire for all things false and base ;" his readers know also that they were no less glowing for all things great and tender.

The Abbot's Secret.

IN September, 1537, the dissolution of the abbey and monastery so long established at Tintern, in Monmouthshire, was ordered by Henry VIII. The monks were expelled, and the abbot commanded to deliver up the abbey seal, all deeds, plate and inventories. Great was the rage and disappointment of the royal commissioners when they were told the inventories had been accidentally burnt some years before, and that the altar vessels and furnishings were of base metal or brass, the reliquaries even being copper, gilt, set with false stones. As all jewels and plate were to be reserved for the king, this fact caused great indignation among the officials, and the abbot was roughly questioned many times, being threatened with death or imprisonment if it was ascertained he had concealed treasures; but he explained he had only been elected abbot a few months and knew nothing of the inventories, but he regretted their loss, as they would prove the abbey had never possessed valuables of any kind for many centuries. After a long and fruitless examination, he was told to depart, and one of the commission being a relative, he was permitted to take the choir book he had presented as a dedication gift to the abbey. From the port of Bristol he sailed for Wexford, and sought refuge with the prior of the Benedictine monastery, where he remained till his death some months after his arrival. His last act was to rebind the choir book and present it to the library of the monastery. These are all the facts known of the last abbot of Tintern Abbey, but some strange occurrences which took place in an old house near the ruins some thirty years back, lead us to the conclusion that Abbot Wych possessed a secret which was to remain hidden for nearly three hundred years, and the whole circumstances are so extraordinary that the account given below is well worth the consideration of those who study and are interested in psychical research.

In the year 1869, the iron works which were established at Tintern soon after 1537 were removed to Portskewit, and the workmen's cottages were allowed to fall into ruins after being

dismantled, but one more important dwelling, which, though in a bad state of repair, was still habitable, was left untouched. In 1600, this had been the residence of one of the proprietors of the iron works, and it continued for many generations in the possession of the same family, till changes of fortune caused them to sell the house, after a fire had destroyed half of it, then it at once became the residence of the managers of the foundries, and when another fifty years had still further deteriorated its appearance, overseers were placed in it who lived and sometimes died there. In 1869 it was decided by the company to remove the works to another part of the country. The last overseer had gone from the house two months, and the inhabitants of Tintern Parva were speculating over its fate, when, to the surprise of all, it found a tenant in Mrs. Herbert, who with her two daughters offered to rent it. She was the widow of a Bristol bookseller, and had during the last year passed through much tribulation, for her husband, possessing the tastes of an antiquarian and being a visionary man, had filled his shop with works quite unsuited to the requirements of the present generation. After a struggle, protracted over many years, the end came at last. Everything had to be sold, which so afflicted the poor old man that he did not long survive the change in his circumstances, and very soon after his death, Mrs. Herbert, hearing Abbey House was to be had at a very low rent, decided to take it, and try if she could live there with her daughters on a small annuity secured to her of £40 a year. In the June quarter of 1869, the small family moved in and settled themselves in Tintern Parva. Abbey House, though in its decadence, was still somewhat superior to the houses near it. Viewed from the front it had the appearance of a large cottage which had seen better days, but looking at it after passing a few yards up the road, a side wing built of stone was disclosed, in which could be seen two beautiful Early Gothic windows, without glass certainly, but with the stone mullions and tracery very perfect; there was a large garden also, beyond it, in which sheds and outbuildings covered with ivy were visible, and a magnificent old chestnut tree shaded the wide terrace walk under the wing. Ancient fruit trees and bushes bordered the path that led to the river bank, where, just below the water, stone steps could be seen, and the foundations for massive piers. Tourists and strangers always made eager inquiries about the

house and asked why the brick front had been added to the stone wing, but no one in the village seemed inclined to answer these questions. All they would or could say was, that they called it Abbey House, because it was near the old abbey, and it was built hundreds of years ago for some great nobleman who owned the iron works; the house had then a large picture gallery and a banquet hall, but a fire broke out one September and burnt all the mansion except the wing now left, and after that, managers and overseers were put in. Then perhaps the narrator would add, "We knows it is haunted! and we never goes a-near it after twilight whatever!" and no amount of questioning could get an explanation of these mysterious sentences. Mrs. Herbert found out before she had been a month in the house that none of the villagers would come near them after dark, and tales were told her in "strict confidence" of figures often seen in the garden, and that in the month of September lights wandered between the house and the ruined abbey.

Mrs. Herbert listened, but she smiled slightly, and refused to credit any of the ghostly stories told her. After many months of anxiety she had found a resting-place, the house and rent suited her small income, and she determined no rumours of shadowy appearances should cause her to abandon her present home.

At this period the family were living in the cottage front, which consisted of two large parlours and two bedrooms over, to which access was given by a door in one corner of the inner room; the outer was entered from the garden through the porch, and another door opposite it led into a passage below the wing and to the kitchens. A noble stone staircase led to the wing, richly carved once, but now much broken. Ascending this about twenty steps, a landing and wide archway appeared, and through the last was seen a long gallery, the end of which was circular and lighted by three long lancet-shaped windows. Two of these were boarded up, and the third gave very little light, as paper had been pasted over at least half of it when the glass had been broken or had fallen out. The walls were whitewashed, and on one side were the two windows which could be seen from the road. They were fitted with frames canvassed over, as a defence against the weather, and their beauty could only be guessed at by the pointed carved tops seen above the woodwork. For

many years the long gallery had served as a lumber room for the occupants of the house. Even now it was covered with straw, bits of boxes, rags of carpet and rubbish of all sorts ; it could not have been properly cleared out for generations. Under the lancet windows stood an old chest about six feet long, without a lid. It was screwed to the floor and clamped to the wall. It had evidently served as a convenient receptacle for useless articles of every description, the quantity and worthless nature of which had prevented time or money being spent on their removal. The chest was full now and overflowing. On the walls still remained marks of where a partition had once divided the gallery and a low arched doorway led into three small rooms at the top of the staircase. The kitchens were part of the old mansion with vaulted roofs and fan tracery ornamentation. The large fireplaces had been bricked up and the size of the windows reduced. These and the gallery were all that remained of the ancient building. Outside in the garden was an archway, under the lancet window, which had long ago been blocked up, leaving space only for a small bench. A few ruined sheds with Tudor Gothic openings for air and light, and a second beautiful stone archway leading into the outer kitchen, were all that now remained of former grandeur.

It was usual in Tintern Parva village to take lodgers for the summer months and fishing season, so that Mrs. Herbert, after consulting her daughters (for they kept no servant), thought she would do so too, and advertised in one of the London papers. She quickly received three replies. One of them she thought might suit ; it was written from the Mitre Hotel, Oxford. A gentleman named Prior and his son wished to make their headquarters in the fishing district of the Wye. They would probably remain only a few days at a time at the Abbey House as they intended to make tours in the neighbourhood, and go and return as suited them. They offered £1 a week for two months certain. It was quite natural that a provisional acceptance of these gentlemen should be sent off by that night's post, and Mrs. Herbert decided that the cottage part of the house should be given up to the lodgers, and she and her daughters arranged to take for themselves the three rooms over the kitchens next to the long gallery. Marion, the elder girl, suggested it "would be a good time to clear it out, so that they could use it as a sitting-room ;"

but Lucy, the younger and more delicate sister, exclaimed, "It would take months to get rid of all the rubbish, and it was a man's work to clean it!" Mrs. Herbert smiled on both, and reminded them that only the strictest economy would allow her to pay for the furniture necessary to furnish the bedrooms, but there would be no objection to turning out the long gallery presently and well cleaning it, as it would make a convenient place for exercise in wet weather.

The day after it was settled to take the Priors, Mrs. Herbert paid a long visit to the rector of Tintern, Mr. Courtenay, to ask his opinion and consult him as to the propriety of requesting references from Mr. Prior, who had not offered any. The rector advised her to write and request a small payment in advance, and all were satisfied when, in answer to a rather timid inquiry on the subject, a letter came inclosing a £5 note for a month's payment.

The next few days were busy ones, and it was a relief to all when the afternoon came that brought a tall grey-haired man and his stout young son of twenty-five in a fly from Chepstow. They had very little luggage with them, if we except a large bundle of wraps and a great display of fishing tackle. Mr. Prior seemed charmed with the quarters offered them, and thanked his hostess for taking so much trouble to make them comfortable. In a very short time they had settled down to enjoy country life in a small village. They had tickets to fish in the preserved waters, and the father with his son walked out every morning in a different direction, sometimes with fishing rods, but more often without.

A very few days after their arrival they had heard all that Mrs. Herbert could tell them about Abbey House and its surroundings, and had examined with the greatest attention every part of the old building inside and out.

Mr. Prior spent hours in the evening talking to Lucy in the garden while she tied up her roses and pinks, or watered the large geraniums in pots, placed each side of the terrace walk, he smoking and observing all around him during the time.

At nine o'clock the cottage part of the house was left in possession of the gentlemen, and the door of communication locked, everything requisite being placed in the parlour that might be required before morning, then the mother and daughters

went up to their rooms in the wing. Mrs. Herbert and Lucy had the inner room and Marion slept alone in the one that opened into the gallery. For the first few nights after the change she fell asleep quickly, only waking in the early morning, but after about a week it became a custom to wake suddenly as if some noise had disturbed her; then she would sit up in bed and listen, but she only heard the mice scuttling behind the wainscot or the wind rattling through the boarded-up windows outside her door. In a few moments she would lie down again and think of the occult books she had read in her father's shop, and wonder how much truth and how much imagination helped to make up the volumes written on such subjects, and how *she* would feel if she became herself the subject of a spiritual manifestation such as were described in books she had read. One night waking as usual with a start, and the night feeling hot and sultry, she rose and walked to the window. All looked lovely outside in the moonlight and she drew a chair towards her and sat down. Her eyes wandered over the river to the hills beyond it, then fell on the garden below, and it was with a shock of surprise she saw a tall figure in white on the walk under her window. She watched it a few moments and then it seemed to melt into the mist of the river near the archway beneath the lancet windows. She recovered herself in a few moments and thought it was a hallucination; then feeling a strange sleepiness steal over her she returned to her bed, and only woke late in the morning when her mother called her and asked her to dress quickly, for she was going to Chepstow market with Lucy and there was much to see to before they could start. Marion was soon in the kitchen preparing breakfast for the lodgers, and when she carried it in Mr. Prior was standing before the little hanging book-shelves, and turning as she entered, said:

"Who reads translations from 'Swedenborg's Life and Writings'? and I see 'Home on Spiritualism' and 'Kane on Mesmerism,' and M. M. H. is written in one. Are they yours, young lady?"

"Yes," answered the girl; "they are old books my father said I might have. Do you understand mesmerism? I have always wished to make that power mine to use for the alleviation of suffering. Do you believe there *is* such a power?"

"It is far too large a subject to enter on now, my dear young

lady," and replacing the book Mr. Prior walked towards Marion, fixing his eyes on her and saying :

"But why did you leave the bird-cage on the breakfast table this morning?"

With a start of astonishment she looked and saw on the middle of the cloth the cage with her canary hopping about in it, but as she rushed forward to remove it, Mr. Prior (still fixing his eyes on her) said :

"Oh, no! there is no cage on the table; it hangs as usual in the window; it must have been the reflection of the sun on the cloth." He quickly pulled down the blind, adding, "You see, I am right."

Feeling rather bewildered, but sure she had been mistaken, Marion gave her mother's message that she and Lucy were going to Chepstow, and asked what orders Mr. Prior had to give about his dinner. To divert her mind from the incident of the bird-cage he said he and his son would be out all day, as they were going to Ross, but if Mrs. Herbert could kindly bring back any letters waiting for them from the post office it would much oblige them; then he added :

"Are you not afraid of being left alone in the house all day?"

"Oh, no!" answered Marion; "I have too much to do to think about being alone, and I shall not have finished till it is nearly time for mother to be back again."

And so it turned out. The clock had struck four and it was a quarter after before she had changed her gown and was taking a well-earned rest in the high-backed armchair which she dragged into the archway of the kitchen door, and in which she lay back comfortably watching the birds and fleecy clouds, and certainly slept for a few moments till she was roused by the sound of footsteps, and then a voice, which said :

"Do not be startled. We found it so hot when we had walked half-way to Ross, that my son proposed we should dine at a village inn and come back again and solace ourselves with a cigar under the shade of the trees by the river."

Marion had started up from her chair at the first word of Mr. Prior's sentence, and answered quickly :

"I am so glad you have returned; now you can tell me more on the subject we touched on this morning. I am most anxious to know something about mesmerism and its power. I hope

my mother will allow me presently to be a hospital nurse, and then I might be able to use it as an aid to medicine if I could acquire the gift of soothing my patients."

With a smile Mr. Prior drew near, saying: "Have you ever seen a person mesmerized? But I suppose not, as you ask for information. Mesmerism is a most useful agent if properly applied, and is able to give blessed relief to suffering humanity; but no one but a strong medium who sympathizes with the sufferer can use it with good effect. But does your mother approve of your studies in this direction?" and then he continued abruptly: "At what time do you expect her home from Chepstow?"

"My mother," answered Marion, "does not quite like me inquiring into these strange "uncanny" things, as she calls them, but she has never forbidden me to continue my studies of the supernatural. I expect she will be back to tea by half-past five."

Mr. Prior lighted a cigar, and after a few minutes of thoughtful silence observed:

"I can tell you wonderful things in connection with this subject, but before I can do so I should like to ascertain if you possess any power as a medium, or if your power is worth developing. To do this I must try if it is possible to put you into the trance state, or, as you would say, if you can be mesmerized. Are you willing to try? Here comes my son with his sketch-book; he shall move your chair a little under the archway in the garden," and then he said to Marion, who had eagerly jumped up and helped to move her chair, "Now sit down! You are not afraid?"

"No!" she replied, "not afraid of being mesmerized, but afraid I may not be a good subject, and your efforts to influence my mind may not be successful."

"Do not think of anything in particular, my dear young lady. Now lean back in your chair, fix your eyes on mine while I make the passes, so; that is well."

Marion had raised her head and fixed her eyes on Mr. Prior's, who moved his hands slowly up and down towards her, and after a few minutes her whole frame quivered and she half started up out of her seat, but with a stern, "Sleep, at once!" from the mesmerist she fell back, her eyes closed, and she appeared per-

fectly unconscious. For a second or two Mr. Prior kept his eyes fixed on her face, still continuing the passes; then he advanced and raised the eyelids and examined the eyes; they were fixed and blind to all outward objects.

"Bryan, come here," were his next words. "Have you the prior's letter he gave me to aid our search? You must take down all she says. We are indeed fortunate in finding a trance medium on the spot to help us; she is possibly also *clairvoyante*," and, taking the girl's hand in his own and placing his other hand on her forehead, Mr. Prior addressed her:

"Marion Herbert, can you follow my thoughts? Tell me who I am! where I came from! and why!"

A struggle seemed to take place in Marion's mind; her lips moved quickly but no sound came, and her hands opened and shut convulsively.

"I order you to speak!" commanded the mesmerist. "Tell me who I am and where I come from!"

"You are a secret agent of a powerful society, and were once a choir boy at Wexford Benedictine Monastery," was the reply, given in a hollow unnatural voice which seemed to proceed from the lips of no living person, so white and expressionless appeared the face in the shadow of the archway.

"Why am I here?"

"You seek a treasure hidden by ——."

"Quick! give me the abbot's paper, Bryan!" and loosing the hand he had held, he placed in it a fragment of yellow paper, which seemed to have been pasted on the cover of a book. Holding it in Marion's hand, Mr. Prior asked: "Can you read this?"

She raised it to her forehead and held it there, and then the monotonous voice read: "I, Richard Wych, last Abbot of Tintern, saved the property of the Church from the hand of the spoiler by concealing it in the chamber of the 'penitent,' under the altar in my private chapel; seek it!"

"Where?" again questioned Mr. Prior, as the voice ceased.

"I cannot say, there is no more writing! All has gone from me! Wait! Ask me another day! My thoughts are troubled! I see an old man writing and fixing his letter on the inside of his missal cover, then concealing it among the other books in the monastery library. Let me wake! I can do no more!"

At this moment the noise of the wheels of the pony-cart were heard on the road, and Bryan exclaimed :

"Wake her, sir, for God's sake! or we shall be caught. Here come the mother and sister."

Quickly removing his hand from the forehead of the girl, Mr. Prior made with both hands the reversed passes over Marion's face and body, and threw the whole of his magnetic strength into his action and voice as he said in a tone of authority :

"Wake instantly! and forget——"

For a few seconds both men hardly breathed, so intense was their anxiety that Marion should recover consciousness; it was with a sigh of relief that they watched her eyes slowly uncloze and her body start into active life again.

As she sat up, Mr. Prior stepped quickly back to the side of her chair and Marion exclaimed :

"There! you see what a bad subject I am. I tried my best to sleep, but could not; the lapping of the water against the bank disturbed my mind. I am so sorry, but I hope you will try me again; one failure will not discourage me. Oh! dear! how tired I feel. I can hardly move. Why, mother and Lucy are coming down the path! How strange! for I heard no carriage wheels. Excuse me, I must go and help bring in the marketing. Lucy is calling me," and Marion passed while speaking through the kitchen archway.

After a pause Bryan observed :

"We are well out of that, father; better luck next time. There is no doubt Father Ambrose is right, and when he found the abbot's book with the double binding which concealed the paper he gave you, he hit the truth when he said the search must be carried on at Tintern Abbey in England, not at the abbey of the same name in Ireland. You must try the girl again or give it up. We shall not get much out of it even if we find the hoard of the old abbot. We have been here three weeks fooling about without result, and we may be called away any day to give the *séance* at Scarborough our agent was to arrange for us—it will not do to neglect the substance for the shadow, father."

"You are a very wise and prudent young man," answered Mr. Prior, stooping to pick up the yellow paper that had

fluttered from Marion's hand as she rose; "but, remember, we are only allowed to practise our 'profession' (shall we call it?) on the one condition that we assist our Mother Church by its aid, if required. We shall surely be reminded of it if we attempt to break faith, and should we succeed we shall be well paid. But you are right: I am rather sick of prowling about in the dark or at early dawn playing the monk. I must confess I was a little scared last night in the garden. I felt sure I saw a figure on the terrace walk, but it was only the mist from the river; approaching it I saw quite plainly the arch under the gallery which had seemed to me a minute before to be a tall shape in white. I do not suppose it possible that any one else is after the abbot's hidings, or I should have thought there were 'two Richmonds in the field.' Ha! ha! but see! there is our landlady coming towards us."

So saying, Mr. Prior and his son entered the kitchen and met Mrs. Herbert, who gave them two letters and the information that high tea was ready in the parlour. When the letters were opened their contents changed the plans laid out by the lodgers for the next week. One was from the agent at Scarborough, telling them the *séance* was fixed for the next week, and from Brighton came a request—almost a command—from Lady Maud asking for their presence at a drawing-room meeting at her house, to which she had invited a large party of friends to witness the marvellous gifts possessed by Mr. Prior and his son; inclosed was a cheque for £50.

An animated discussion took place over these letters, and when it was concluded the Priors went in search of Mrs. Herbert, whom they found in the kitchen exhibiting her purchases to Marion, and the little family party experienced a shock of astonishment when the announcement was made to them that important business called their lodgers away before five next morning. They must catch the first train to London at Chepstow and would breakfast there. No one was to get up to see them off. After accounts were settled, promises were made by Mr. Prior that they would speedily return and write frequently; then "good-nights" and "good-byes" were exchanged, and with much hand-shaking all round the father and son returned to their rooms to finish their interrupted meal, and after it to pack their bags with necessary articles for a week, leaving

the rest of their luggage directed, so that it could be sent to an address in London if necessary.

* * * * *

The night after the Priors left, Marion woke as usual just before dawn, and feeling a cool air pass over her face, imagined she must have forgotten to fasten her door securely. Without waiting to light her candle she felt her way to it. As her hand touched the handle it fell open and she became aware that the whole gallery was filled with a luminous mist, through which all objects were distinctly visible. Advancing a step to see if it came through the broken windows she was suddenly arrested and unable to move; turning her head towards the end where the windows were situated, she saw (or imagined she saw), in the place of the old chest, a high altar covered with a white embroidered cloth; on it were placed tall candles, vases of flowers, silver vessels, and in the centre a crucifix; above all, on a bracket, a large figure of the Virgin, and in front, on his knees, an old man dressed in white, whom she vaguely seemed to recognize. As she looked on him he disappeared, shadowy forms passed her and she felt the air displaced as they advanced towards the altar, on reaching which each pair laid something they had carried between them on the lowest step. They knelt at the sides, and in a moment the altar slowly moved along the wall, and as Marion gazed, faded or became absorbed in the surrounding mist, which gradually clearing away, the old chest became visible, and the tall lancet windows above it. Then that strange feeling of sleepiness fell over her, and some power impelled her with quite resistless force into her room, where she was placed on her bed and slept heavily till morning.

Marion Herbert being a child of an intellectual visionary, it was necessary, to keep nature's balance even, that she should be endowed with the gift of practicality, and therefore, though she vaguely sought books treating of the spirit world, she read them not to gratify an ignorant pleasure found in reading blood-curdling narrations, but with the view of ascertaining if the powers written of could be employed to benefit any one. This practical method of treating the information she acquired was the means of relieving her mind of those fears experienced by the ignorant and superstitious. So that when, on waking, her thoughts turned to the vision of the night, she sought to find a

key to it and a reason why such a circumstance should have occurred to her, feeling strongly that there was a purpose in it which she was to find out. After some reflection she determined on taking the first step, which should be the cleaning and clearing out of the long gallery. On joining her mother and Lucy at breakfast she proposed that as their lodgers had left for a week or two and there was much less work, it would be a very good time to turn out the long gallery. "We can get in Mrs. Marshall, mother, to help Lucy and me," she said; "she is a very strong, capable woman. We will run down to the cottage and secure her for the afternoon. You, dear mother, are to sit in the porch with your knitting; we will surprise you by tea-time with a new clean room."

By four o'clock that day the washing and scrubbing of the gallery was in vigorous progress, and at half-past Mrs. Marshall came downstairs, hot and dusty, saying she must now go home and get her children's tea. The young ladies would not want her again till next morning, as there was not very much more to be done. All was cleared out except the old chest. After paying her, Mrs. Herbert put down her work, and thinking the girls might like tea soon went towards the kitchen to see about it. As she opened the parlour door a crash and loud exclamations met her ear. Much frightened, she ran up the stairs into the gallery, and at first could see no one, the dust was rising in such thick clouds from the end of it, under the windows. Advancing hurriedly, she perceived Lucy holding Marion's hands and trying to pull her out of the old chest. When she reached them they told her there was not much the matter, no one was hurt, but Marion had jumped into the chest to clean it out quicker, and part of the bottom broke away with a loud noise, and she fell through, but not far, as a ledge on which her feet rested had stopped her. It felt like a step, she said, and she believed there were more underneath. Would her mother fetch a light while they threw out the rest of the rubbish and examined? In a very few moments the girls had cleared away enough to show, after the decayed splinters of wood were removed, that there were stone steps beneath, and, tucking her dress closely round her, Marion squeezed herself again into the hole and carefully crept down them, feeling her way with hands and feet. She had to stop once or twice, as the dust she stirred up in her descent

nearly choked her, and she had to keep constantly assuring her mother there was no danger. When she had nearly disappeared she held out her hand for the lamp, and Mrs. Herbert and her youngest daughter held each other's hands tightly while both entreated her not to be too venturesome, or stay below longer than a few moments. They soon heard knocking and thumping on a hard substance, and then Marion's voice as she came back again telling them there was an iron-bound door at the bottom, tightly fastened up or locked, but there was no lock or keyhole, and she had found it quite impossible to move it. Lucy then suggested that the best plan would be to send and inform Mr. Courtenay, the rector, of their discovery, as he had always been so interested in examining the old wing, and had once or twice speculated that it had been the summer residence of Tintern's abbot. Marion seconded Lucy's suggestion, and the latter was soon walking quickly to the Rectory; but she was warned by her mother to tell no one she might meet on the way, or the whole village would come to "help or hinder," said Marion.

While waiting for Mr. Courtenay, Marion gave her mother an account of her dream (she called it) of the night before, and her impression that something was to be found out in the neighbourhood of the gallery, and now she felt sure they were on the track of a secret, and were to be the means of bringing some hidden deed to the light of day. She only trusted it would not turn out to be anything dreadful, such as a murder and the discovery of the victim's body. The village would gossip if that turned out to be the case, and they would never come into the house or near it, that was quite certain. Meanwhile mother and daughter busied themselves taking out the remaining fragments from the old chest, and when, in less than half-an-hour, Lucy returned with the rector all was ready for his investigation. He was intensely interested in the discovery of the concealed stair, and pulled off his coat while Marion held the lamp, by the aid of which he proceeded to enlarge the opening in the inside of the chest. When this was done twenty stone steps could be counted, and the iron-plated door, without bolt or lock, seen. In a few moments Mr. Courtenay had gone down and stood before it. He thumped, pressed against it with all his strength, but it was quite immovable. A very heavy iron ring hung about a foot from the top, and although it could be pulled

up and down did not appear to have any connection with the door fastening ; it weighed quite four pounds, and after twirling it about for a few minutes Mr. Courtenay decided it was a useless attempt at rough ornamentation, and requested Mrs. Herbert to give him her heaviest hammer and he would try to break open the door. While she was seeking it he remained waiting at the top of the steps talking to Lucy. Marion, meantime, who had carried the candle, stood beside the door they could not open, and amused herself by throwing the light upon the walls here and there, and then taking the ring in her hand she wondered for what purpose it had been placed in that position, till hearing her mother's voice she let it slip suddenly from her fingers, when immediately there was a loud clash followed by a noise of something falling, and the door opened so suddenly that Marion only just saved herself from being precipitated into the opening by catching hold of the post next her ; the candle, falling from her hand, was extinguished. Hearing the clash made by the falling of the ring, also Marion's stumble and low cry, Mr. Courtenay ran quickly down to her, calling to Lucy to bring matches, or another light. A lamp was soon passed down to him, and relighting the candle both entered through the now wide-open door into a vaulted chamber, which was like a crypt below an old church. It felt cold, but not damp ; air evidently found ingress somewhere ; the walls were covered with rudely painted frescoes representing scenes from the Old and New Testaments. At one end was a large crucifix, before it a low stone bench, and on the opposite side a rude stone altar.

Searching carefully all round the walls several recesses disclosed themselves, which had once been concealed by iron shutters painted to match the walls ; they were now dropping to pieces. Many were only hanging by the massive locks, and rusty fragments lay scattered over the stone floor. On the shelves behind were leather bags of different sizes, much decayed, and the stitching of which having rotted away, tarnished metal of some kind appeared from the openings. When Mr. Courtenay placed his hand on the heap, and gently moved it, the entire mass suddenly collapsed, and a heap of articles rolled out from the crumbling cases in all directions. There were chalice cups, alms dishes and church plate of every kind, which it did not take long to discover as being of silver and silver-gilt

Passing on to the next recess, they found a quantity of tattered pieces of silk which covered some dingy velvet boxes, which, falling to pieces as the silk rags were displaced, disclosed two small chests with crystal sides and lids, covered with metal work of elaborate design, and thickly encrusted with stones of all colours. After gently dusting these and examining both with much attention, Mr. Courtenay pronounced them to be very ancient reliquaries, and probably of great value. Searching further they found in an arch, concealed by the stone altar, a black leather case filled with coins of all values—none later than 1536—and wrapped in a gold embroidered cope on the altar itself lay a large silver-gilt cross, bearing an inscription showing it to have been the foundation gift of William, Earl of Pembroke, to the Abbey of Tintern he built at Bannow, near Wexford. History disclosed that in 1413 it had been sent to the parent monastery in England on account of the rebels destroying the country round Bannow.

In a state of great excitement Marion returned to the bottom of the steps and informed her mother of the discovered treasures, asking for a large basket in which to bring some of them up. While waiting for this the iron-bound door and its secret contrivance for fastening it was examined. It turned out to be after all very simple. The large heavy iron ring fell on a movable plate of the same metal, and in doing so knocked away a bar which had to be adjusted from an opening beneath the chest every time the chamber was left. Very quickly a portion of the treasure was placed on the table in the parlour, and all could see it was of great value and antiquity. When the dust of ages had been softly blown off the reliquaries were found to be of gold, mounted with crystal sides, and the stones were, no doubt, jewels of value; the little heaps of dust they contained could never be identified as paper, bone or rag, and it seemed possible the relics might have been removed. The silver plate, when brought up from the crypt, consisted of every article required for the furnishing of one or two altars, and during their investigation of each piece of silver Mr. Courtenay gave most valuable information to Mrs. Herbert respecting treasure trove, and told her the Crown would probably claim all, but might, perhaps, make her a present after the value was arrived at. When the old chest was examined, experts were of the opinion that it had

once undoubtedly formed an altar, and though apparently fixed to both wall and floor, it had originally moved in a groove, and could be pushed along till the entrance to the stairs came in sight on one side. Time had obliterated all traces of the groove, but the slit, wide enough to admit the adjustment of the bolt, was seen directly the chest was removed. It was very wonderful that the stairs had never been discovered.

This story has been a long one, therefore we will not linger over all the details that arose from the circumstances of the finding of the abbot's hoard. The Crown claimed all, and Mrs. Herbert delivered it up. But after the legal difficulties had been settled with the owner of house and land, the family were presented with £150. Some of the church vessels were eventually placed in our national museum, and the others were distributed to country museums, and much was sold.

In a very short time all the antiquarians in Wales, and many from England, were flocking to the Abbey House. Every one insisted on seeing the long gallery, and even crept down into the vault, and a succession of visitors wasted hours of the Herberts' time. Added to this annoyance constant streams of letters containing requests for information arrived, which if not answered directly, were often followed by the appearance of the writers in person. Under these circumstances no one was surprised that Mrs. Herbert decided to leave at the end of her six months' tenancy.

About ten days after the discovery of the treasure a letter came from Mr. Prior. On opening it two inclosures were found—and this fact is as curious as the whole story. One was for Mrs. Herbert, and expressed great astonishment at having seen in all the papers an account of the treasure trove, and regretted that business would prevent the return to Tintern of his son and himself. The other letter in the envelope was written on thin paper to an intimate friend in France, and had evidently slipped in by some strange oversight or mistake. It gave an account of the Herbert family and of all the events of the last month, with a graphic description of Marion being placed in a trance state, and ended thus: "If I had not been a stupid owl I should have looked for the Abbot's Chapel in the gallery, instead of among the ruins in the garden." Nothing more was ever seen of the father or son, but they were

heard of as holding *séances* all over the country as electro-biologists and mesmerizers.

Two years after the Herberts left Tintern an end came to the history of Abbey House. The owners, finding it would not let, and that no one would venture near it, pulled it down and built cottages with the materials on another site. The aspect of the neighbourhood is changed in all but one respect. Near the terrace walk flourishes the old chestnut tree, and the ancient yews still show signs of vigorous life by the river bank. They serve as a landmark to a generation fast passing away, who point them out as having once flourished in the garden of the Abbots of Tintern.

A. OMAN.

No Just Cause or Impediment.

By HELEN F. HETHERINGTON,

Part Author of "PAUL NUGENT, MATERIALIST," "NO COMPROMISE,"
etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU look as pleased as Punch! What is it?" General Arbuthnot asked, as he looked over the well-stocked breakfast table at the beaming face of his wife.

Mrs. Arbuthnot raised her eyes from the letter that she was reading. "Oh, Tom, it has really come off. Milly is engaged to Jack."

"And you call *that* a matter of congratulation?" with uplifted eyebrows.

"Don't *you*? Just what I've been hoping for, ever since Milly grew up into the darling that she is," folding up her letter and letting her mind stray through wide fields of happy possibilities.

"They ought never to be allowed to go in double harness—that's what I say," thumping the table with his fist, as if to impress the fact on his wife's mind. "Have you forgotten Ned Mainwaring, who was as mad as a hatter?"

"He fell out of a dog-cart and injured his head, but that is no reason why his nephew should do the same," placidly eating her buttered toast. "Jack's a capital whip."

"Perhaps he fell out of his cradle, and that accounted for his eccentricities at Westminster," with sarcasm that was meant to wither. "And then again, on the other side, there's Lottie Buchanan, who fancied that she had married a doctor, and was always making up pills, to save him trouble."

"Ah, but you forget; she had a dreadful illness, and the rash went in instead of coming out. Dr. Smith said that was quite enough to account for it."

"Dr. Smith was a humbug."

"I don't care about Dr. Smith," throwing him over as he proved to be no use, with true feminine celerity; "but why you are raking up all these unpleasantnesses, I can't imagine."

"Because I believe in heredity," gloomily, as he took up the *Times*.

"Do you? I don't," with a superior air, as if heredity were a third-class article of faith.

"My dear, how can you be so—absurd?" in gentle expostulation.

"Heredity does away with free will."

"Not at all. When I talk of heredity I simply mean inherited tendencies."

"Yes, tendencies which push and drive, and which no one can resist. Talk of heredity and free will. Positively ridiculous! You might as well put a man on a switchback and tell him to stop when he likes."

"Not a bit of it. The break is in our own hands, and that's where free will steps in. However, have it as you like. Ask these two young idiots down here—beslobber them with congratulatory kisses——"

"Splendid idea!" rising from her seat in a flutter of excitement. "Love-making goes on so much better in the country, and, dear things, I long to see them. I will write this very day."

"Isn't Amy Grainger coming?"

"Yes, so she is," thoughtfully. "But never mind, she can amuse you and me. She can be very agreeable, you know."

"Yes, when she likes," drily, "which isn't often."

"I think you are a little hard on her. I've an idea that she was rather fond of Jack herself," Mrs. Arbuthnot said slowly, as she locked up the tea-caddy.

"If she is, there'll be the devil to pay," grimly.

"Oh, no, no; Amy is a sensible girl, and she will look upon him as a married man."

"I fervently hope not, if what the society papers say is true."

"But it isn't, and everybody knows it, you old bird of ill omen." As she passed she gave a fond pat to her husband's bald pate, for these two were made after the old pattern of Darby and Joan—the last examples living at the end of the nineteenth century.

Miss Amy Grainger arrived with her usual punctuality, looking as neat as if she and her garments had only just been invented. Mrs. Arbuthnot put out many subtle feelers as to the state of her affections with regard to Jack Mainwaring, but Miss Grainger was as reserved as an expensive seat for which no one will find

the cash. If she liked him a little too much, she concealed it carefully, and welcomed the lovers with the utmost cordiality. Jack Mainwaring was tall and broad-shouldered, with decent features, a pleasant expression, fair hair and a frank smile; whilst Mildred Buchanan was tall and slight, with a small head, which she carried uncommonly well, and a pretty, refined face.

The general and his wife made much of them. Mildred was given the best room, and a bottle of '47 port was got out for Jack. They both seemed to be in the highest spirits, and to look upon matrimony as a blessed institution, especially invented for their own particular happiness.

One morning, when the sun was drying the dewdrops on the roses, Amy Grainger, in her pretty pink cambric, came out on to the terrace to help Jack smoke. She leant upon the balustrade in a pensive attitude, looking far into the distance, where the haze still hung over the wooded hills. Jack, who was sitting on the stone ledge, smiled as he knocked the ashes off his cigarette.

"I think I must have been born under a lucky star," he said cheerfully. "Whatever I do I fall upon my feet. See what an opening I've already got at the Bar, when other fellows, with ten times the brains that I have, are left without a brief."

"You must remind yourself of Polycrates," Amy said slowly. "What are you going to throw to the gods?"

"Nothing—till they ask for something." There was a pause, till he broke out again, as if he were so brimming over with joy and gratitude that he could not keep silent. "Then as to Mildred—such a chorus of congratulations! Everybody seemed almost as if they were as glad as we were—not one dissentient voice."

"Excuse me." Amy saw her opportunity, and pounced on it pitilessly. "How can you tell? you would be the last person to hear of any objection."

"But there are no objections," he said testily, for her remark came like a dab of cold water on the warmth of his heart. "You couldn't fabricate one if you lay awake for three weeks."

"As if I wanted to!" with an air of injured innocence. "I wish you all the happiness possible in this very contrary world."

"That's so good of you, but how about the other people?" he persisted.

"Well, if you *will* have it, they say that your relatives on both sides took odd ideas into their heads."

"That's nothing new," he interrupted quickly. "The longer I live, the odder I find my neighbours. Everybody has a craze for something or other."

"Yes ; but they are not crazy," significantly. "Think of Mr. Edward Mainwaring and that Miss Buchanan—Lottie Buchanan they called her."

Jack burst out with his hearty laugh :

"Good gracious ! I'm not to marry Milly because her great-aunt lost her head as well as her heart, and my own uncle was more or less of a fool."

"There's nothing to laugh at," Amy said crossly, disappointed at the small damage done by her bomb.

"Well, thank heaven ! there's no 'just cause or impediment,' so nobody can forbid the banns. There are the horses—so I must be off."

He threw the end of his cigarette over the parapet and hurried into the house, whistling "Linger long o' Lu," as he went.

Amy looked after him with a frown, for his high spirits were absolutely exasperating. There is nothing so annoying as perfect content in other people when you yourself are discontented.

"Are not you going for a ride ?" Mrs. Arbuthnot asked her when she presented herself in the library.

"What's the good of playing second fiddle ?" she returned crossly. "I am not a good hand at it myself."

"You are not over fond of a back seat at any time, are you, my dear ?" the General said as he looked up from the letter he was writing.

"I never was, and I never shall be," she answered with decision.

"Wait till you are my age, and you won't feel at home on anything else," he replied with unconscious mendacity, for humility was not his most conspicuous virtue. "Where's your aunt ?"

"Standing on the door-step, of course, to see the model pair ride off. I believe she thinks there is nobody like them."

"A nicer pair would be hard to find."

"I thought you didn't quite approve !" looking round in surprise.

"Tut, tut, child ; we don't want to croak. There they go.

That girl has a capital seat, and Jack never looks better than on horseback," he said admiringly.

"Such high spirits," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, uplifting her hands, as she came back from the Mill. "They talk of matrimony as if it were a game of play, but I tell them it is a very serious business."

"From your own experience, auntie?"

"Yes, serious; but not altogether unpleasant," with a smile that beautified her rather rugged features.

The General invited Miss Grainger to take a ramble through the woods, and his wife, on kindness intent, went down to the village with a basket on her arm.

* * * * *

Luncheon was nearly over, but Jack Mainwaring and Mildred Buchanan had not yet returned from their morning ride. The General laughed and said that lovers were always unpunctual, and he had not the slightest doubt that they would prefer a *tête-à-tête* luncheon later on. The hostess's mind was exercised about one dish being kept warm and another properly cool. Amy Grainger was wondering, not for the first time, why Jack Mainwaring had not proposed to her the year before. She had nothing to reproach herself with, however, on this subject, for she had given him every opportunity, and left him scarcely a shadow of doubt as to the state of her own sentiments; and yet he had gone off without a word that she could construe into an offer. And now the wretch was engaged to Mildred Buchanan, a girl without two ideas in her head. The General was speculating about the possibility of putting Jack forward as a representative of the Conservative interest in that division of Blankshire, when the door was thrown open, and Milly rushed in—her hair dishevelled, her hat awry, an unspeakable horror in her eyes.

At sight of her there was a simultaneous pushing back of chairs and a tightening of heart-strings, for it was evident that something awful had happened.

"Where's Jack?" exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, breaking the fearful silence.

The poor girl looked quite dazed, but she answered hoarsely:

"Out there—in the dust of the road—quite dead—dead. Oh, my God!" wringing her hands wildly. "I—I—loved him so!"

Mrs. Arbuthnot gave a cry and sank back upon her chair, as if the shock had suddenly deprived her of all power in her limbs; but the General laid his trembling hand upon Mildred's shoulder.

"Where is he? Tell me exactly, that I may go and bring the boy home," he said unsteadily, for his anxiety was terrible.

It seemed as if she could not disconnect her thoughts from the one central fact of Jack's death sufficiently to give a definite answer. She rambled on about an engine, which they concluded to mean 'a traction-engine—a red flag—Tempest rearing and plunging—and Jack thrown on the road with the blood soaking his fair hair.

"But where was it?" cried the General in agonizing impatience. "Was it on the lower road, or near the Mill?"

"Yes, the Mill;" and then throwing herself on her knees, she hid her face on Mrs. Arbuthnot's lap.

Whilst a party started for the Mill in a break, a groom was galloping in the direction of Dr. Ackland's house, and Amy Grainger was running to the post office to wire to an eminent London surgeon.

CHAPTER II.

THE Grange was as still as if the shadow of death had already fallen upon it. And every thought was centred on one darkened room. A black blight had fallen on the brightness of youth and hope; and of the happy lovers who had started for their ride a few hours ago with sunshine in their hearts and in their eyes, one was lying incapable of thought or motion, lost in the unknown regions of coma, with a bandaged head and a heavily-laden chest; whilst the other, trembling with the fear of the future, overcome with the horror of the present, could only sit on the floor by Aunt Clarice's side, rocking herself backwards and forwards with low sobs and moans, which were more heart-rending than wild bursts of tears. Miss Grainger was subdued; but she found relief from the awe that oppressed her, in making herself as useful as she could. She felt that she could do anything rather than sit still, and let the horror of this great misfortune take possession of her. As she wrote letters for her uncle and aunt, the picture of Jack as she had seen him carried in, with that changed, ashen face, those powerless limbs, kept coming between her eyes and the sheet of paper; but she

struggled on, inwardly despising Mildred for giving way so entirely.

The long days followed each other in slow succession, whilst cerebral meningitis worked its will on Jack Mainwaring. The coma passed off and was succeeded by delirium. Day and night his voice, changed to a shrill treble, echoed down the long passages, making the maids shiver as they went about their work. This was worse than anything, for no one could get away from it. A hurried volume of words spoken so fast that they tripped one over the other, but yet uttered in tones of imploring entreaty; questions that waited for no answer; purposeless prayers that yet were weighted with the utmost earnestness; a perpetual restless motion of the wounded head which threatened to loosen the bandages; whilst the hands which had grown so thin and white were never still, but always pulling at sheet or coverlet as if they would tear them into shreds. Another nurse had to be engaged, for the first was worn out: a man-nurse with a strong patient face, who looked as if he had the endurance of a martyr and the strength of a Samson.

Poor Mrs. Arbuthnot grew sadder and sadder. Mildred looked like the mere shadow of her former self; but now that she had recovered from the first shock, she was showing a sweet patience and a quiet resignation, which Amy called "callousness" and the Arbuthnots "Christian fortitude." Weeks passed away, and the first nurse departed, for the patient had partially recovered his physical strength. That terrible voice no longer echoed through the house except at long intervals. Mrs. Arbuthnot and the General paid frequent visits to the invalid, and always came out looking additionally depressed. In spite of her earnest entreaties, Mildred was never allowed even to get her foot inside the door at the entrance to the west wing, to which Jack's rooms belonged. She would stand for hours in the gallery waiting and hoping for permission to go in, but this was refused again and again, firmly but tenderly. Mrs. Arbuthnot asked her one morning if she did not think a little change would be good for her.

Mildred said at once that nothing would induce her to leave the house whilst Jack was in it—"unless her hostess were tired of her," she added with a painful flush. Aunt Clarice, as she liked to be called by her adopted nephew and niece, took

her in her arms and embraced her heartily, and said no more about her leaving. The General also tried his hand, but with no success, so they gave it up as a bad job. Amy Grainger, finding the house insupportable, had gone off to pay a long-promised visit to her cousin, Mrs. Waveney, who lived about six miles from the Grange. She had prayed her aunt to send her constant news about Jack Mainwaring, and Mrs. Arbuthnot suggested that it would only be kind if Mildred would drive over and tell her how he was going on.

"But there is nothing new," she said sadly, "and it is such a distance, and I should be so long away."

"Put up the horses for an hour whilst you are having tea, and then come back as soon as you like. I will give you a note for Amy, which I should like her to have at once, so that you will be doing me a service at the same time," Mrs. Arbuthnot said persuasively.

Very reluctantly Mildred consented to go; but when the carriage came round she almost refused to get into it. A frightened look came upon Mrs. Arbuthnot's face, as she exchanged glances with her husband. The General put on his most decided manner and would listen to no excuses.

"The air will do you good," he said encouragingly, "and Pratt can't have the carriage out for nothing."

"But couldn't he take the note?" looking up eagerly into his—for once—unresponsive face.

"He would say he was not hired to be our postman. Not to be thought of, my dear. Allow me to see you off."

It was not in Mildred's nature to stick to any point ungraciously, so she yielded at last, and Mrs. Arbuthnot breathed a sigh of relief as the landau rolled down the drive.

"I wish we could have arranged for her to stay there, at least, for a night," she said with the earnest tones of great anxiety.

"But it was impossible. Now we have no time to lose," pulling out his watch; "if we don't get them off by this train, Mildred will be back upon us before we are ready."

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Mildred's mind was painfully at work as she leant back against the cushions of the comfortable carriage, in an attitude of complete laziness. She had felt during the last day or two as if she were surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery. She often came

upon the General and his wife talking together in confidential whispers, and she knew that another man had arrived who looked more like a doctor than an attendant, and yet never appeared either in the dining or drawing room. If Jack were no worse, why should he want all these people to look after him? She could not understand it, and felt sure that something was being kept from her, which at all times is the most unpleasant of feelings. Only last night she had been startled from her sleep by a noise in the gallery which sounded like a scuffle between several men. She had jumped out of bed to lock her door, being scared at the thought of burglars; but just as she was turning the key, a voice, which she could have declared was Jack's voice, rang out in an angry shout: "Curse you. I'll kill you. I'll do for you—you scoundrel!" What was happening? Jack had surprised the burglars, and he was fighting for his life. In an instant she had forgotten everything but the necessity for helping him. She caught up her dressing-gown and threw it over her shoulders, and snatching up her large-handled umbrella as the only available weapon, rushed out to save him. But when she reached the gallery nobody was there. The silence was intense, not a sound to break it but the loud ticking of the old-fashioned clock down below in the hall; the green baize door of the west wing was closed and looked as if it had never been opened. As she stole back to her room, shivering with fear and cold, she wondered if it could have been a dream; but no, she recollected that she was in the act of unlocking her door when she heard Jack's voice.

When she mentioned it to her aunt the next morning, Mrs. Arbuthnot told her quite crossly that she had been suffering from nightmare, and she must never eat stewed peaches again. But as a matter of fact she had not touched the stewed peaches, and she had never known a nightmare last when a person was wide awake. Everything was very odd and unsatisfactory, and life seemed a vastly different affair to what it was when they two started for a ride together, on that June morning—those long weeks ago. She could hear Jack humming "*Linger long o' Lu,*" in the gladness of his heart; she could see the hay-makers munching their dinners under the scrap of shade afforded by a hedge; she could feel the young blood dancing once more through her veins, whilst the lovely bud of the present was bursting into the still more glorious bloom of the ideal future. The sunshine

which flooded field and lane was but typical of the happiness which swelled like a mighty river, and filled every corner of her life. And then in a moment it was gone—the booming of an engine—a strip of scarlet appearing beyond the branches of a thorn—a restive horse plunging madly—a white face down on the hard road half hidden by a cloud of dust—and the joy of existence was over!

Weary with thinking she reached Waveney Hall, when she was relieved to hear that its mistress was out. Amy was delighted to see her because she had been yearning for news of Jack Mainwaring. She pounced on Mrs. Arbuthnot's note like a dog on a bone, but as she read it, all the healthy colour vanished from her cheeks and she uttered a loud exclamation of horror:

"Gone—and you let him go!" staring reproachfully into Mildred's sorrowful face. "Oh, if I had been in your place, I would have looked after him myself. I wouldn't have let those horrid keepers come near him. I'd have soothed him and cheered him, and brought back his mind by slow degrees. I know I could have done it, but you are such a poor helpless thing!"

"What do you mean?" Mildred asked breathlessly. "Jack is at the Grange. He hasn't gone, and there are no horrid keepers."

"You've been in the house the whole while and you don't know half as much as I do," Amy exclaimed contemptuously. "I tell you he has gone this very day, gone to a dreadful asylum, and he'll be a lunatic for ever, and I shall never, never see him again."

"Oh God, he isn't mad!" Mildred cried in an agony of fear, as she seized Amy's arm.

"Yes, he is mad," staring fiercely into that pair of wild eyes which Jack had thought so divine, "and he will be madder and madder, and he'll never come out, and it's all your fault from beginning to end."

"Jack mad!" Mildred murmured. She had no thought for anything else, and Amy's accusation passed unheeded.

"Yes, if I had been with him he never would have been thrown; or if he had, I shouldn't have run away and left him in the road," excitedly.

"Amy, tell me, it isn't true, he's not been taken away?" her chest heaving, her pretty lips trembling, her whole heart hanging on the answer.

"As surely as I stand here," Amy answered fiercely, "they

have carried him off to an asylum this very afternoon, and they will make him worse than ever."

"Ring the bell ; order the carriage," imperatively.

"What for ?" in surprise.

"I am going back to stop it," holding up her head and speaking with decision.

"But the horses must rest. You can't go. Aunt will be wild with me," cried Amy, beginning to be alarmed at the effects of her indiscretion ; but Mildred said she would walk home if she could not have the carriage, and she passed quickly out of the room and through the hall with her lips pressed tightly together, and her eyes staring straight in front of her. "It's six miles. Do stop ; you can't walk ; you'll never get there. Of course the horses must go if they drop by the way," Amy called out as she flew after her.

But Mildred would stop for nothing, and Miss Grainger could only send the carriage after her as fast as it could be got ready. The coachman was cross and declined to hurry, so that by the time he reached the high road Mildred's slender figure was out of sight. In her fierce impatience the winding road seemed endless, and seeing an open gate, she struck across country in the hope of saving precious minutes. Whilst she was wandering helplessly amongst the fields, the empty carriage pursued its way to the Grange, where its unexpected arrival caused the acutest alarm. The General himself started in pursuit of Mildred, whom he found at last crossing a field of new mown hay, with the glow of the sunset behind her. Her white face was raised as if on the watch for some expected sound, but her large eyes were fixed before her in a dull despair.

"Am I in time ?" she asked hoarsely, as he drew her arm within his arm.

With an uncomfortable sensation, he noticed that she did not seem in the least surprised to see him in that field, miles away from home, and exactly at his dinner hour. "In time for what ?" he asked with a dread of the answer.

"To save Jack."

"My dear child, I—I don't understand," he said nervously, though he understood only too well, and anathematized Amy Grainger for having let the cat out of the bag after all their careful plotting.

"To save Jack from being taken away. Oh! I must run!" She tried to tear her hand away from his arm, but he held it firmly.

He looked down upon her in her breathless hurry, and his kind old heart felt breaking. She was utterly worn out, and she had no idea of the way, and yet her love would have carried her on till midnight with that one hope in view.

"There is no use in running," he said gently. "Can't you trust us to do the best for Jack? We loved him before you knew him."

"Let me go, or I shall be too late," struggling frantically.

"Mildred, listen to me," he said earnestly, feeling acutely that he was much too old for this kind of thing. "*You are too late.*"

He felt her shudder from head to foot as he held her hands in his grasp. Suddenly she turned her head sideways and looked at the sunset. Its glory irradiated her worn face and gave it a strange beauty; her lips parted into a smile, her eyes shone like stars. "He is over there waiting for me," she said, with a little nod. "I thought he would not go without me." Then, exhausted in body and mind, she slid down gently into the fragrant grass at the General's feet. Her eyes closed, and her tired head rested against his knees.

CHAPTER III.

MISS AMY GRAINGER was very uncomfortable in her mind for all the rest of the day; and the next morning she borrowed Mrs. Waveney's pony-cart, and drove to the Grange, in order to explain that she had never read Mrs. Arbuthnot's postscript, enjoining secrecy, until after Mildred's departure. The amplest apologies for her indiscretion were small amends for the disastrous results, and both uncle and aunt received her coldly. Mildred's mind never recovered from the shock, and after a week of wearing experience at the Grange, she was sent off into another county to be under the care of a doctor. Her mania took the form of mental depression, and she would sit day after day with her listless hands in her lap, and tears running down her wasted cheeks. She was perfectly quiet, but very obstinate in a gentle, unobtrusive fashion. Once a day she wrote a letter to Jack Mainwaring, which she insisted on posting for herself, dragging out her attendant in all weathers. If Dr. Spence attempted to keep her from doing this she would refuse to eat for the rest of the day;

so he rarely interfered, wisely thinking that imprudence was better than starvation. The letter never reached its destination, for it had no address but "Jack," and proved a daily instance of futile loving endeavour.

Contrary to the expectation of the doctors, Jack's malady took a favourable turn at last, and one day in December he came out of the asylum, thinner and paler than he used to be, but with a perfectly sane expression in his frank blue eyes. His first thought, of course, was Mildred, and he made his way at once to the Grange. The General and his wife received him with the utmost joy, Mrs. Arbuthnot actually crying over him as if he had been a returned prodigal. Their whole energies seemed bent on making up for the ravages of disease on his usually healthy frame; and they tried to stuff him with nourishing foods and drinks every two hours of the day and night. But when Jack asked questions about Mildred, they were not equally willing to satisfy the hunger of his heart. In their nervous dread of upsetting his mind they would only tell him that she was far from strong—that her aunt, with whom she generally lived, had gone abroad—and that they were not certain of her present address. Jack's impatience grew fiercer as the days went on, and, at last, despairing of getting anything out of them, he asked where Amy Grainger was, feeling sure that she could tell him all that he wished to know.

"Gone back to her own home, 13, Hyde Park Square," Mrs. Arbuthnot said unsuspiciously; but that very day Jack started for London.

Amy came to meet him with shining eyes and out-stretched hands. She saw her happiness within her grasp; Mildred Buchanan was out of the way, and Jack had come back to her of his own accord. In the first rush of joy she felt inclined to hug him.

"You are not afraid of me, Amy?"

"Afraid of you! Not a bit. Only so awfully glad to see you. Sit down in that arm-chair, and have a cup of tea."

"First, before anything else, tell me where Mildred is," he said eagerly.

Her face clouded; her straight brows drew together in a frown.

"You haven't come here to talk about Mildred," she said pettishly.

"Indeed, I want to know that more than anything. I am sure you can tell me."

"And if I do tell you, you can't go to her."

"Nothing on earth shall prevent me," his eyes kindling; "in a small-pox hospital or a prison, I'd go to her like a shot."

"Jack, can't you be content without her?"

She leant forward with the most seductive smile on her pretty lips, the firelight playing on her golden hair and the fairness of her skin. She was pitilessly pitting her own great attractions against those of the absent, and with her whole heart and soul she meant to win.

"No, I can't," he said bluntly. "You don't know what she is to me. We are both so alone in the world; and when we came together we wanted no one else. She is an orphan, you know, and I have only a father who is wrapt up in his scientific grub-bings amongst old bones, and scarcely knows that he has a son. If I had died as soon as I was born, my bones might have been of some interest to him, but—living—he doesn't care a rap for me."

"But there are plenty of others who do—friends, and that sort of thing," she added with a blush.

"Yes, but no one who loves me as she does. Amy, is she ill? Is she in England? Where is she? Tell me, for God's sake."

His vehemence frightened her, and she said quickly:

"She is at Potter's Bar, in Hertfordshire, with a Dr. Spence."

"With a doctor? Then she *is* ill!"

"Ill in mind," significantly.

"Good heavens! not—not mad?" breathlessly.

Amy nodded.

He hid his face in his hands. It seemed more than he could endure. Was this the hereditary curse with which others had threatened him, and which he had scoffed at in the security of his untouched happiness? Was this innocent girl to suffer through the cruel law of inherited tendencies, and had his own temporary aberration been the natural product of heredity, and not the consequence of a casual accident, as the doctors had impressed upon his recovered mind? He was shaken to the very core of his being by a fearful doubt; and, to his own inner self, he seemed to be standing on the edge of a precipice down which Mildred had already fallen, and into which she was beckoning him with her small white hand.

"Jack, listen," a soft voice said close to his ear. "She has gone out of your life like last summer; but next year there will be another summer, and can't you console yourself with another love?"

"Another?" He raised his head and looked into her pretty face with eyes that scarcely were conscious of her beauty, or even of her identity. "There couldn't be another for me. I must go to her at once. Perhaps the mere sight of me may cure her." And he started up in his eagerness.

Amy caught him by the sleeve. "She won't know you. You will make her perfectly wild. You mustn't go near her."

"If she doesn't know me I can do her no harm. At least I shall try," gently disengaging her clinging fingers, and moving towards the door.

She sprang before him, her whole lithe figure vibrating with the force of her agitation. "Jack, don't go. Something dreadful will happen—and all the blame will fall on me. Indeed—indeed it will," she said imploringly, tears filling her large blue eyes.

"If you were Mildred, and you knew I could come to you, and I never came—what would you think of me?"

"But she doesn't know—she is dead to all consciousness of love."

"My voice will rouse her," confidently.

"You are wrong. Oh, Jack! can't you believe me?" clasping her hands.

"I *won't* believe you—that's what it is," with a sad smile. "And I suppose it is impossible for you to guess what Mildred is to me. Good-bye."

"It's much too late. You can't go to-day."

"It is late," he said disappointedly as he looked at his watch. And then he sighed heavily, as he acknowledged that perhaps it would be wiser to put off his visit till the next day.

"Then you will stay and dine with us," Amy said promptly. "My father and mother are longing to see you again."

Jack had no objection to come back to dinner after going to dress at his lodgings, for he had a natural dislike to meeting acquaintances at the club, who might look upon him still as a lunatic. That evening, Amy tried her very best to charm him by her brilliant talk as well as by her sparkling prettiness. He was feeling unspeakably sad, but he tried to rouse himself lest his

host and hostess should imagine that he was still suffering from mental depression. Sometimes he could not understand Mr. Grainger's allusions ; and then he guessed that they had reference to the months which were a blank to his intelligence. A few months had literally been taken out of his life, a fact which he was anxious to make every one else forget, and Amy ably seconded his efforts. Whenever she saw a puzzled look on his face, she came adroitly to his help in such a way that no one else suspected that she was supplying him with a key to what had just been said. Jack was deeply grateful for her secret assistance over the quicksands of conversation, and Amy flattered herself that she was making great progress into his favour. When he bade her good-night, he gave her hand a tender pressure, which sent the blood bounding through her veins. If she could only keep him from going to Hertfordshire the next day, she thought that the memory of Mildred Buchanan might pass into the land of shadows, whilst Amy Grainger might take her place in this pleasant world of reality. As she only believed what she wished to believe, according to the prevailing fashion of the day, she was convinced that Jack's madness was the simple outcome of his accident ; whilst Mildred's was the natural result of inherited mania. If Mildred recovered her senses she would have been horrified if a Grainger proposed to marry her ; but if Jack Mainwaring opened his arms, she would have jumped into them as if they had been the safest abiding place possible.

"Let me write and prepare her before you go," she said earnestly, as she let her hand rest in his clasp.

"Write if you like, but don't ask me to wait," he replied with a smile that chilled her.

She stood at the top of the stairs watching his tall figure going down into the hall. The lamp-light fell on his fair hair and his upturned chiselled face as he waved a good-bye. He was the goodliest man to look at that she had ever seen, and she felt as if he were going from her for ever ! With a chill foreboding she went to bed that night, and yet dreamt that she was his wife, and he was her own for now and always.

CHAPTER IV.

EVERY branch, and leaf, and twig was wreathed in the feathery whiteness of the frost, as Jack stood on the door-step of a prosaic-

looking red-brick villa and rang the bell. His face was set, for the eagerness with which his heart was brimming was fighting with a fearful dread. If he saw her and she did not know him, what then? He felt as if it would kill him. As he followed the butler into the doctor's study his heart was thumping wildly, and his voice was far from steady as he explained the object of his visit.

Dr. Spence had a bald head with a fringe of white hair round it, a fat face, a pair of bushy dark eyebrows, which met over two large and penetrating eyes, and a brisk, decided manner. He stared hard at Jack as if he found him an interesting study, whilst he asked him a few questions, as to whether he had come alone, &c., which the latter thought irrelevant; and presently suggested that as Mr. Mainwaring seemed in such a hurry, his best plan would be to go out and meet Miss Buchanan on the road. She had gone to post a letter, and a casual meeting would perhaps excite her less than one after careful preparation. As he conducted Jack to the hall door, he caught up his hat, and said quietly, "I am not coming with you, but I shall be close at hand."

A shiver ran through Jack's veins, and as he walked down the ice-bound road his knees actually knocked together. He saw two figures coming towards him—one he recognized at once; the other was short, broad and common-place, probably that of an attendant. "Oh, God! will she know me?" he said to himself with white lips, and it seemed to him as if his whole life hung on the issue of the next few minutes. A lump came in his throat, and he felt as if the power of speech was going from him, whilst his heart thundered in his ears. She was quite close to him now, but she was not looking at him. Her eyes were on the road at her feet, her thoughts where no one could follow them. She was beautiful still, he saw, as his eyes devoured her face. But oh! the glory of that beauty was gone, utterly gone, and only the shadow remained. She would have passed him, but he stepped before her, and tried to take her hands. She started back as if terrified, and kept them hidden in her long cloak.

"Mildred, my darling, don't you know me?" he gasped, and fixed his eyes upon her, all aglow with his passionate love.

There was no recognition in hers, they went away from his eager face to the woman by her side. "I've posted the letter—take me home."

The words, the tone, the look, fell like ice upon the fever of his heart. In one moment he slipped down from the heaven of hope to the hell of despair.

"I'm Jack," he said hoarsely; "Jack, who loves you. Mildred, speak to me!"

But the cloud on her brain would not lift. She turned away from him as if he frightened her, clinging to the woman's shawl.

"I write to Jack, but he never comes," she said in a quick, hurried tone; "never—never—never."

"Jack is here—I'm Jack; look at me and see me!" he cried in an agony.

For one instant her restless eyes passed over his face, but the intense longing in it had a strange effect upon her. She shivered visibly from head to foot, and then, with a loud scream, broke away, and started running down the road.

Jack stood quite still, looking after her, his heart and his hope dying within his breast. Mrs. Jennings, the attendant, spoke to him encouragingly, but her words did not reach his understanding. There in the distance was Mildred with Dr. Spence bending over her and trying to soothe her. She had run away from him to go to that strange doctor. She had looked in his face, and failed to recognize him. She must be mad indeed! He, who never swore, uttered a fearful oath and looked fiercely round with raised stick, as if ready to fight any one who came near him. Mrs. Jennings shrank back into the hedge, but it was no tangible foe against whom he owed a grudge. It was this stern inexorable fate which was pursuing him and her.

He went back to town with despair at his heels. What had come to Mildred would some day come to him. Some day he would not know his dearest friends—he would turn his back on them as she had done, and run after a stranger. Perhaps he would write letters to Mildred, as she did to him, and then not know her if she came before him.

"Buy a bit of holly, pretty sir; and a many happy Christmases to your honour."

He was standing on the steps of his lodgings in Bury Street, as the flower-girl thrust a spray of holly before his unseeing eyes. He shuddered at her words. "Happy Christmases" without Mildred! What a bitter, biting mockery! If she only knew!

He turned away from her, too much engrossed with his own

thoughts even to throw her a shilling. He wanted imperatively to be alone. He let himself in, and sprang quickly up the stairs as if he were in a great hurry. Unlocking a drawer, he took out a revolver and loaded it.

There was a knock at the door.

"Wait a minute," he said quietly, and the next instant there was a loud report and a heavy fall.

General Arbuthnot nearly knocked over the servant as he dashed past her into the room. But in spite of his haste he was too late. Jack Mainwaring was quite dead. For the first time in his life a coward—flying from the fate he had not the courage to face!

* * * * *

"I dreamt of a friend last night," Mildred Buchanan said the next day, with a smile on her face such as had not been seen there for months. "I think he will come to-day."

Strange as it may seem and almost incredible, his visit, though she did not recognize him at the moment, roused the dormant faculties of her mind. She gave up writing those abortive letters, but every day she posted herself at the window to watch for his coming up the path. Amy Grainger came to see her on a sudden impulse for Jack Mainwaring's sake. Mildred knew her at once, and greeted her with quiet pleasure, but her first question was:

"Where is Jack?"

Amy thought of the day when he had come to her and asked, "Where is Mildred?" and broke into a passionate burst of tears.

Mildred gave a startled look at the girl's black dress and jet ornaments, which she had not noticed before. A great trembling seized her, and she put her hand to her forehead as if half bewildered by the fear which was growing more and more terrible to her.

"Tell me the truth," she said in a harsh tense voice as she bent forward. "Is he dead?"

As Amy raised her head and looked straight into the beautiful face before her, the old bitter grudge against this girl who had stolen Jack Mainwaring from her, spoilt his life, and sent him to his death, revived with tenfold intensity.

"Yes, he is dead," she said on the impulse of the moment. "You wouldn't know him when he came, so he went home—and died."

She could think of nothing but Jack shot dead by his own hand for the love of this girl before her, but the next moment repentance came.

Mildred had slipped down on the carpet, her white face looking so terribly cold that Amy thought she was dead. In an agony of remorse she knelt down and lifted her heavy head on to her knee, and prayed and besought her to speak; and then she rang the bell furiously and the doctor and Mrs. Jennings came at once.

From that day Mildred Buchanan faded gently away, but she died at the Grange, tended by the friends who loved her best.

"Perhaps you will believe now in the curse of hereditary tendencies," the General said gloomily as, just returned from the funeral, he sat down in his arm-chair and drew it close to the fire.

"I believe in Amy Grainger," his wife replied, mournful but unconvinced, as she wiped her swollen eye-lids; "that girl blurted out the news of Jack's terrible state to Mildred when it ought to have been broken to her as gently as possible. It was enough to craze *any one*," with emphasis. "Not content with that, she sends him down to see her when the slightest shock to his brain must be fatal. And then, when the worst has happened to him, and she can do him no further harm, she actually takes herself off to Potter's Bar, just as there is some hope of the poor dear girl, and literally crushes her in mind and body with the news that Jack is dead. There, I've no patience with her, and she shall never come near me again."

"Still you must allow that it is as clear a case as possible of inherited tendencies breaking out in the second or third generation," the General persisted, as he held his hands over the fire.

"As clear a case as possible of jealousy on the part of Amy Grainger," rejoined Mrs. Arbuthnot; "always breaking out on every possible occasion, until both her victims are dead," she wound up with a sob; and then abruptly left the room, determined to have the triumph of the last word.

An Unaccountable Verdict.

By WILLMOTT DIXON.

THERE was a solemn hush in court and all eyes were fixed upon the prisoner, as the Clerk of Arraignment, after reading the indictment, put the question, "What say you, Guilty or Not Guilty?"

The answer came in a clear, firm voice, "Not Guilty:" and the counsel for the Crown rose forthwith to open the case for the prosecution.

The prisoner, Laban Mortlock, farmer, stood in the dock charged with the wilful murder of his neighbour, Henry Martin, also a farmer. The murdered man was sixty years of age; the man who was accused of murdering him was but thirty—a tall, stalwart, fair-haired, fresh-coloured, good-looking young fellow, with an open manly face and a frank winning look in his grey eyes. "Not in the least like a murderer," was the opinion expressed by strangers in the crowded court who saw him for the first time. But then it is notorious that murderers seldom do resemble preconceived ideas of their appearance.

The evidence against the prisoner was as follows: Reuben May and James Street, two farm labourers in the employ of Henry Martin, deposed that on the morning of the 2nd of June they entered a certain hay-field belonging to the said Henry Martin and, climbing over the hedge, came suddenly upon Laban Mortlock standing, with a pitchfork in his hand, over the prostrate body of their master, who lay motionless at the prisoner's feet, with the blood welling from a wound in the chest. The body was still warm when they touched it, but the heart had ceased to beat.

They further deposed that the prisoner, Laban Mortlock, was in a state of great agitation, and that there was blood upon his hands and upon the prongs of the pitchfork which he was still grasping. He seemed dazed when they asked him what had happened and made no reply. There was no one else to be seen anywhere near the spot.

William Taylor, carter, deposed that as he was taking his team

along the lane which ran through the hay-field, he saw the two witnesses, May and Street, and the prisoner, Mortlock, standing in a group beside what appeared to be the body of a man. He went up to them and, with the assistance of the two labourers, placed the body in his cart and drove it to Henry Martin's house, whilst May and Street took the prisoner, who made no resistance, to the village constable. Taylor swore that he passed no one on his way to the hay-field, and that there was no one anywhere in sight except the three men who were standing over the body of the dead man.

It was further stated in evidence that when the prisoner was brought before the magistrate and charged with the crime he simply said, "I am innocent. I know nothing at all about it."

The medical evidence proved that Henry Martin had died from the effects of two punctured wounds in the chest, one of which had penetrated the heart. Great violence must have been used, and the pitchfork produced was such a weapon as might well have caused the wounds.

Then came the question of motive. Several witnesses deposed to the fact that the deceased and the prisoner had notoriously been on very bad terms for some time past; that there had been a violent quarrel between them, and that the prisoner had more than once been heard to say that if Henry Martin were a younger man he would thrash the life out of him. It was understood that the cause of the quarrel between them was Martin's refusal to let Mortlock marry his daughter. It was elicited in cross-examination that Martin was a man of violent temper and over-bearing manners—a man whom many feared and whom every one disliked.

When the last of these witnesses had left the box, the counsel for the Crown sent a thrill through the court by his next announcement.

"Call Harriett Martin."

There was a moment of oppressive silence, followed by that indescribable stir and pulsation which reporters usually designate "sensation," as a tall young woman in deep mourning and heavily veiled entered the witness-box. She was evidently suffering from intense agitation, but with a resolute effort she controlled her feelings, and when she raised her veil and kissed the book her demeanour was calm and composed. Her face was a striking one,

unquestionably handsome, though there was not a particle of colour in it, and the dark eyes, fringed with long lashes, only threw into stronger relief the dead white of the complexion.

For the first time since the trial began the prisoner appeared to lose his self-possession. His face flushed and then went pale, his lips quivered, the hand which rested on the railing of the dock visibly trembled. For a moment he looked keenly and anxiously at the woman in the witness-box, then his eyes fell without meeting hers, and he only raised them again once whilst she was giving her evidence.

Counsel for the Crown proceeded to examine the witness.

"You are the only child of the late Mr. Henry Martin?"

"I am."

"Your mother, I believe, has been dead many years?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that there has been a long attachment between you and the prisoner?"

"Yes, for several years."

"Your father objected to the prisoner as a suitor for your hand, did he not?"

"He did."

"Have you any idea what the reason for his objection was?"

"There had been a quarrel between Mr. Mortlock's father and mine, and my father had never forgiven him. I believe they quarrelled over some property. They went to law about it and Mr. Mortlock's father, who has been dead for some years, won the lawsuit. My father's hatred of the whole family of Mortlocks was intense."

"Was there any other reason for that hatred?"

"I have heard that my father was very much attached to Mrs. Mortlock before she was married and wished to make her his wife, but she preferred his rival, Mr. Mortlock."

"Did you consider that your father's opposition to your marriage with the prisoner was fixed and irrevocable?"

"He said that he would never consent to our marriage, that he would rather see me dead than the wife of Laban Mortlock, that if we married whilst he was alive he would strike me out of his will, disown me as his daughter, and never speak to me again; and that if I dared to disobey his wishes after his death I should find that there was a clause in his will by which, in the event of

my marrying Mr. Mortlock, every farthing of his property would be taken from me."

"But as a matter of fact, I believe, there was no such clause in the will and everything was left to you unconditionally?"

"Yes."

"The will, I believe, was dated some years before he knew of your attachment to the prisoner?"

"It was."

"Were you aware that it had not been altered and that it contained no such conditions as your father held over you as a threat?"

Here the witness became painfully agitated; her face, if possible, grew more deadly pale than ever; her very lips were white. She looked as if she were going to faint; a glass of water was handed to her. She took it in her trembling fingers, drank a little, regained her composure and faced the counsel for the Crown, who repeated his question.

"Yes," she replied, after a slight pause, "I was aware of the contents of the will."

There was a sensation in court; every one felt that something was coming which would tell terribly against the prisoner.

"I will not ask you how you obtained access to the will and made yourself acquainted with its contents, but you admit that you did so?"

"I do."

"Did you tell the prisoner that you knew the purport of your father's will, and that he had not altered it?"

There was a long pause, the witness was evidently struggling against strong emotion. The stillness in court was appalling. The question was repeated. In a faint hesitating voice she said:

"Yes. I think I did tell him once."

Every one in court seemed simultaneously to draw their breath as if a blow had struck them. For who could fail to see that this fatal admission had placed the rope round the prisoner's neck? It supplied the motive for the murder. If Henry Martin died suddenly—before altering his will—then his daughter would inherit his property *unconditionally* and there would be no obstacle to her marriage with the prisoner.

After receiving that answer counsel for the Crown announced that this concluded the case for the prosecution, and sat down.

But counsel for the defence had something to ask the witness, and elicited from her the information that her lover had been so angry with her for prying into her father's will that they had had a serious quarrel over it. She was then asked if she believed the prisoner capable of committing such a crime, and the emphasis of her reply startled and thrilled the court. Drawing herself up to her full height she looked proudly and fearlessly round, and then in a clear voice, every tone of which vibrated with passionate love and trust, she exclaimed:

"No! I know him too well to believe him capable of such an act. He is too honourable, too high-minded, too manly, too gentle to do any deed of cruelty or wrong. I am as certain of his innocence as I am that I stand here."

For the first time since she commenced her evidence the prisoner looked up, his face was flushed, his eyes sparkled—for a moment his gaze met hers, then she burst into tears, and was gently led from the witness-box by the prisoner's solicitor. The effect of that outburst of womanly love and pride and faith upon the court was indescribable. Every one, including the judge himself, was deeply moved and many could not control their sobs and tears. It was some moments before the counsel for the defence could sufficiently command his feelings to open his speech. He pleaded eloquently; he did all that he could do for his client. He called witnesses to character; he strove to show that it was against all reason that a man of such high principle and manly, straightforward disposition should commit such a crime, and he solemnly warned the jury to beware how they convicted an innocent man on purely circumstantial evidence.

But a mere sentimental harangue, however eloquent, could not weaken in the slightest degree the solid chain of damning evidence which the prosecution had forged without a single missing link against the prisoner.

The judge summed up, pointing out that no attempt had been made to rebut the evidence produced by the prosecution, or to cast any reflection upon the veracity of the witnesses. Against the mass of evidence brought forward by the Crown there was only the prisoner's denial of his guilt. Still, if the jury had any doubt, the prisoner was entitled to the benefit of it.

Doubt! What possible doubt *could* there be in the mind of any sensible and reasonable person who had listened to the evidence!

The prisoner had been caught red-handed beside the body of his victim with the blood-stained lethal weapon in his hand. He was well known to have had a deadly quarrel with the murdered man, and then there was the powerful motive for the crime. True, as counsel for the defence had pointed out, there was the inexplicable fact that the prisoner, instead of trying to escape, had remained stupidly by the body of his victim. But the prosecution accounted for this on the ground that he had been struck with sudden remorse for his deed, and before he could recover from its paralyzing effect and escape he was suddenly discovered.

When the jury turned round in court to consult, it was generally thought that they would return a verdict of "Guilty," without leaving the box, and it was a surprise to many when the foreman intimated to the judge that they wished to retire.

Half-an-hour passed—an hour—two hours—and still the jury did not give any sign of returning. The people in court wondered what on earth there could possibly be to raise any doubts in the minds of twelve sensible men as to what verdict they should give. At last the judge sent for the jury and asked them if there were any point on which he could assist them in their deliberations. The foreman, a well-known and influential gentleman farmer in the district—Leonard Matthews by name—replied that he was afraid his lordship could not assist them. There was a strong difference of opinion as to a matter of fact and there seemed little prospect of their coming to a decision.

"Not come to a decision!" exclaimed the judge. "The case does not seem to me to present any insurmountable difficulties in the way of arriving at a decision. I must send you back to renew your deliberations, gentlemen, and I hope that after once more calmly reviewing the evidence you will see your way to return a verdict. Remember that upon you, gentlemen, rests the solemn responsibility of seeing that *justice* is done."

The jury again retired and another hour passed. Among the public in court surprise was fast giving way to irritation and indignation at the stupidity or obstinacy of the pig-headed section of the jury who could not or would not be convinced by the conclusive evidence brought forward for the prosecution.

"I should have thought," said one county magnate, "that the mere fact of having such a man as Leonard Matthews as foreman would have been enough to secure a speedy agreement. There

is not a shrewder man or one better able to weigh evidence in the county. And he's such a masterful man, too, and so much respected that I should have thought his opinion would have borne down all opposition—though where the opposition can come from in this case I can't for the life of me imagine."

The judge had left the court and dined. When he came back the jury were still absent and had made no sign, though they had now been in consultation for upwards of five hours. His lordship peremptorily ordered them to be sent for; and there was unmistakable sharpness and irritation in the tone in which he addressed them:

"Gentlemen, I have no wish to hurry you in your deliberations, but as you have already been five hours in consultation and as it is getting very late, it now becomes my unpleasant duty to have you locked up for the night without fire, food, or candle as the law directs."

This was evidently meant as a threat, and the foreman saw it. He turned his dark, determined face to the judge and said:

"My lord, you will, of course, take whatever measures the law enjoins. I can only say that we have thrashed this matter out, and that as yet we are unable to arrive at an unanimous decision. But if your lordship will allow us another hour, I think, perhaps, that will obviate the necessity of locking us up for the night."

"Very well, I will give you an hour, and if by that time you have not agreed upon your verdict, I must have you locked up for the night."

For the third time the jury retired. It was now nine o'clock. More than half the people who had thronged the court had gone away, but the rest held on with dogged patience, determined to see the tragedy out to the bitter end.

At half-past-nine the judge received the welcome announcement that the jury had agreed upon their verdict, and once more took his seat upon the bench.

The prisoner was brought up from the cells and placed in the dock. Then the jury filed one by one into the box, and amid breathless silence the Clerk of Arraignment put the question:

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are," replied the foreman.

Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"*Not guilty!*"

The judge looked up startled and amazed, and every one in court drew a long breath of surprise. There was dead silence for a moment, then the judge said slowly:

"Gentlemen, it is a most extraordinary and unaccountable verdict, but I am bound to accept it, though I cannot understand it."

Then, turning to the prisoner, he said sharply:

"Laban Mortlock, the jury have found you not guilty—you are discharged."

The prisoner bowed to the judge, and, as he turned to leave the dock, glanced for a moment with a perplexed air at the foreman, who stood there, tall, stern, erect, with a grim look on his face, which the bystanders interpreted as the expression of his deep displeasure at the verdict.

It certainly was, as the judge said, a most unaccountable verdict, and by what process of reasoning the jury could have arrived at such a conclusion no one could conjecture. The prevailing impression was that there had been a gross miscarriage of justice, and that if ever a man had been guilty of murder it was Laban Mortlock.

* * *

The next day was the last of the assizes. After the business of the court was over, the judge sent a note to Mr. Leonard Matthews, requesting him, as a personal favour, to call in the evening.

When they were alone together his lordship said:

"Mr. Matthews, I leave this town to-morrow morning. It is not probable that I shall ever revisit it, at any rate in my judicial capacity. Before I leave I wish to know whether you have any objection to impart to me privately, under pledge of secrecy, the circumstances which led the jury, of which you were foreman, to return that extraordinary and, to me, unaccountable verdict in the case of Laban Mortlock. In all my experience, both at the Bar and on the Bench, I cannot recall any incident which has so astounded and perplexed me. I cannot dismiss it from my mind, and I have therefore taken the very unusual course of sending for you to ask you, for my private satisfaction, to explain to me this singular miscarriage of justice."

"It was not a miscarriage of justice, my lord," replied the foreman, "but further than that I do not know that I am

justified under any circumstances in disclosing the secrets of the jury-box."

"The case is exceptional, Mr. Matthews, and I, as a judge, am so deeply concerned in the administration of justice that I think I almost have a claim to know why and how justice has failed in this instance. I do not ask out of mere personal curiosity, but in my judicial capacity, and I need hardly say that whatever you confide to me shall never pass my lips unless I have your permission to make it known."

"My lord," said the foreman, "*justice has not failed*;" then, rising from his seat in great agitation, he paced the room in silence. At last he paused and, confronting the judge with a face pale and working with emotion, which he could not control, he said almost in a whisper:

"My lord, if you will give me your solemn word that you will never divulge what I tell you to a living soul until you have my written permission to do so, I will confide to you a secret known only to myself."

"Mr. Matthews, I pledge you my word that whatever you reveal to me I shall sacredly keep secret."

"I accept your assurance, my lord, and I will confess to you that *I* was the sole cause of that verdict. My eleven fellow-jurymen were unanimous for a verdict of guilty, but I fought the question so fiercely that I argued them out of their convictions; and I did so, my lord, because I *knew* the prisoner was innocent, for it was *I, myself*, who killed Henry Martin."

The judge started, looked hard at the painfully agitated man before him and said slowly:

"*You—murdered—Henry Martin?*"

"I killed him, my lord, but it was not murder. Henry Martin was a man universally detested. He was cruel, vindictive, treacherous—with a heart as hard as flint. I had had a long dispute with him over an affair which I need not particularize and he was peculiarly bitter against me. I met him that morning in the hay-field alone and demanded a speedy settlement. He flew into a passion, and, after using the most grossly insulting language, raised the pitchfork which he carried to strike me. I closed with him and wrenched it from his grasp. He struck me in the face with his clenched fist, and maddened me with a bitter taunt. My blood was up. I did not know what I was

doing. I drove the pitchfork into his body and then, without waiting to see whether he was dead, fled, along the ditch, crouching as I ran, till I reached my own house. When I heard that Laban Mortlock had been arrested for the murder my first thought was to give myself up. But then I reflected that if I did so, my name, my position, my honour, would be forfeited, and my life would be ruined. I had not the courage to face the consequences of my crime. I would wait and see what happened. Laban Mortlock would surely be able to prove his innocence. I made up my mind, however, that he should not hang for a crime of which he was innocent. If the worst came to the worst and he were convicted, I would come forward and save him by avowing myself the guilty man. So I waited to see what course events would take, and you know now how I was able to save Laban Mortlock without implicating myself."

There was a long silence, broken at last by the judge.

"Mr. Matthews, I can see that you have passed through a time of terrible mental suffering and I have no desire to add to your remorse. But forgive me for pointing out that, great as your sufferings may have been, they can hardly have been greater than those endured by the innocent man whom your cowardice has condemned to the fearful ordeal of being tried and almost convicted for a crime of which he was as innocent as I am. The shadow of that crime rests on him still. Will you allow it to rest there, or will you clear his character and make him the only reparation in your power for all that you have caused him, and the woman who loves him, to suffer?"

The foreman stood with downcast eyes—the veins on his forehead swelling and the muscles of his face twitching nervously. The struggle within him was a terrible one. At last he raised his head and in a hoarse, broken voice said:

"My lord, I have granted your request. I have solved for you the mystery of the verdict. I have intrusted you with my secret. Do not ask more of me. For whatever I may do in the future I hold myself responsible to God and my own conscience alone."

And without another word Leonard Matthews left the room, and the judge saw him no more.

Five years later the judge received a sealed document with a letter from "the executors of the late Leonard Matthews, Esquire,"

informing him that the said sealed document had been found among the papers of the deceased with directions that it was to be forwarded unopened after his death to his lordship. The document contained a confession of the crime, with full permission to make the same public, and the writer stated that a similar document would also be forwarded to Laban Mortlock.

Not till his death, then, did the pride of Leonard Matthews suffer him to consent to the publication of his secret.

On ascertaining that a similar sealed document had duly been dispatched to Laban Mortlock, the judge took no further steps in the matter, leaving it to the person principally concerned to take what measures he pleased for the vindication of his character.

But Laban Mortlock never made any sign, and was apparently careless of his good fame. He had long since shaken off the dust of his native land from his feet, and he and his faithful wife were happy together "by the long wash of Australasian seas."

This Transitory Life.

By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness."—*Prov.* xiv. 10.

LORD HARBOROUGH and Valencia sat together at dessert. The former poured himself out a glass of claret and, having regarded it critically for some seconds, drank it off, cleared his throat and spoke.

"What do you think about Douglas, Val?" he asked.

Valencia looked up from the pear she was peeling. She was a handsome girl and strikingly like her brother, physically and mentally, but without his cynicism.

"I wish I knew," she said. "I can't make anything of him. Marrying that woman has been the ruin of his life. While she lived she was nothing but a burden to him, yet now she is dead he seems to regret her, and looks utterly miserable."

"It's a great pity he had to resign. Having nothing to do makes him feel things more keenly. I wish he could be persuaded to take some interest in politics."

Lord Harborough was an ardent politician and one of the great pillars of the Primrose League.

"Is there any place he could stand for?" inquired Valencia. "It would give him something else to think about."

"I have just heard, privately, you know, that Smith is going to take the Chiltern Hundreds. A year or two ago there wasn't a Radical tradesman in Harborough, but now things are different and at the next election the Liberals intend running some shoemaker fellow from Birmingham, so the seat will be contested."

"The very thing," exclaimed Valencia. "We will return Douglas with flying colours. I'll go and talk to him about it at once." And she left her seat in search of her brother.

Events in Rome, prior to Straight's resignation, had, of course, reached Lord Harborough's ears, and he thought his son amply punished for his folly in marrying Alice—"that woman," as he and Valencia always called her. And when they heard the news of her death they both felt thankful that Douglas was free.

"Only she might have had the decency to die before she ruined his career," remarked Valencia.

They were both very much surprised, on his return to Harborough House, to see how much he apparently took his wife's death to heart.

It was some time before Valencia found her brother, sitting by the pond, idly smoking cigarettes and watching the fishes.

"We've always been chums, Douglas," she began, dropping down beside him. "I want you to listen to what I've got to say."

"The father has been talking to you about me, I suppose. Well, speak on. I shan't be angry at anything you say."

Douglas, perhaps, cared more for his sister than any one else, always excepting one woman.

"Well, of course, old fellow, you've had a lot of trouble and all that, but you're free now ; and it's no end of a pity to go on moping about your lost position and all that. You've been doing absolutely nothing for months now. Don't you think it's about time to make a fresh start ?"

"True, my sister. I decidedly lack your energy."

"Of course, it was an awful shame you had to give up the F. O. ; but, still, there are plenty of other things you can succeed in. Politics, for instance. Now, there is to be an election at Harborough, and, if you will stand, you are sure to be returned. I can guarantee you all the watermen's votes. There is some Radical fellow standing, too, so there will be fighting to be done. Oh, it will be grand fun."

"Thanks ; I am not ambitious to make speeches to a drunken lot of artisans, and kiss dirty brats, while enthusiastic Primrose Dames bribe the mothers with tea and buns."

"Think of your duty to your country, Douglas, and don't talk heresy. Politics is the finest game in the world, not even excepting hunting. Last year, at the general election, I canvassed all the Brierly district and converted ten undecided voters. Frank Dalton had the honesty to own that, without my help, he would never have won."

"In the good time coming, Val, when your sex has suffrage, I'll do my best to return you for the county, but at present I don't propose to take any active part in the affairs of the country."

Valencia looked keenly at him for a minute or two.

"I've never known you without ambitions before," she said. "There's something behind it."

"And that something is ?"

"The other woman."

Straight started, but resumed his composure in a second.

"Your theories interest me immensely," he drawled; "please continue them."

"I've nothing more to say," said Valencia, rising to go. "I've only offended you; but I repeat, it's a pity. That's all."

Douglas flung away his cigarette.

"Don't go, old girl," he said; "I'm not offended; only there are some things it is better not to rake up. You're right, anyway, about my loafing here; it's not the sort of life for me, and I'll drop it. Sorry I haven't any leanings towards politics or agricultural matters; but I'll travel; go on an exploring expedition or something of the sort, and on my return I'll write a book which shall contain even more ignorance and mis-statements than those of the ordinary globe-trotter."

CHAPTER XIV.

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past."

Shakespeare, Sonnet xxx.

A COLD, stormy winter's day. The waters of the Mediterranean, blue no longer, but a dirty green colour, dashed against the rocks and threw clouds of blinding spray inland. Margaret, standing at the edge of the cliff, did not heed wind or rain, but looked through the mist at the mainland, going over her past life for the fiftieth time that day and wondering what her future would be. Should she live out her life for ever wandering, like some restless spirit, from place to place, but always avoiding large towns and places where she would be likely to meet acquaintances? Or would it not be better to return to Australia and take up her abode on her husband's property? She had often thought of doing this, but she could not bring herself to leave Europe. It seemed like cruelly breaking the last tie that connected her life with Douglas Straight's. Of him she had heard nothing since the day of her hurried flight from Rome. She had carefully avoided reading English papers, or anything that could remind her of the old life. Yet, the more she tried to forget and persuade herself that the past was nothing to her, so much the more did she regret it.

About a fortnight before Margaret had come to Capri and taken up her abode in a small out-of-the-way hotel frequented

by Germans, and had vainly tried to occupy herself in sketching the quaint houses and picturesque costumes of the people, having made up her mind to give herself up to *lotos-eating* in a land where, as Straight once said, "all things were forgotten." If she could only find that land. How many are there of us who echo Margaret's wish? Surely the lucky discoverer of such a land would make his fortune.

"Not much of a place on a wet day, is it, Mrs. Smith," said a cheerful voice behind her, and turning round Margaret saw the only other English occupant of her hotel. It must be explained that on leaving Rome Mrs. Trent assumed the name of Smith in order to render herself less easily traced.

Mr. Coles was an artist who spent winter after winter on the island from combined motives of economy and health, and was the only person with whom Margaret had spoken much. He had indeed given her some lessons in sketching and they had read Tasso together during the long evenings.

"Not painting to-day, Mr. Coles?" inquired Margaret.

"No, I have come to a standstill for want of a cake of smalt, and am making that an excuse for a trip to Naples. You like a rough sea, Mrs. Smith; suppose you come with me. I want to show you those frescoes I was speaking about last night, in the museum. We shall have plenty of time to do that, and some shopping too, and return by the afternoon boat."

Margaret agreed, and three hours later they landed on the *Chaia*.

The day cleared up considerably and the time passed pleasantly enough studying the wonderful relics of Pompeii in the great museum. Mr. Coles was an interesting companion, and in listening to his explanations Margaret for a short time forgot the past. All too soon the day passed, and it was time to return to the steamer. As they walked towards the *Chaia* they passed a small crowd of people waiting, baggage in hand, to go on board an *Orient* liner which lay near. Suddenly Margaret stopped, her heart seemed to stand still and a mist rose before her eyes. There, not three yards in front of her, was Douglas Straight hurrying along intent on getting a good place on board the tender.

"What is the matter?" asked her companion.

"Oh, nothing. At least I gave my ankle a twist; it will be all right in a minute or two," she replied, lying with that readiness which comes to the most truthful of us at such times.

So they stopped, and Margaret to give colour to her story sat down on a low wall.

The most momentous issues of our life hang upon the merest trifles, and had it not been for one small occurrence Straight and Margaret might never have met again.

A miserable cripple had dragged himself on to the path and was importuning alms from the passers-by. Hitherto his efforts had not met with much success, and as Straight passed him unheeding he grew bold and caught hold of his coat. Douglas, with an imprecation, turned sharply round to free it, and then beggar and everything else on this earth were forgotten as his eyes met those of the woman he had been seeking.

CHAPTER XV.

"A GLIMPSE OF HAPPINESS."

SPRINGTIME again. More than a year had passed since the day on which Straight had met Margaret at Naples. The sunshine was pouring in on the balcony overhanging the Arno as Margaret came out for a breath of fresh morning air. She looked younger and fairer than ever, as she picked a spray of jessamine and put it in the bodice of her habit. Happiness is a great beautifier, and the past year had been spent in a state of halcyon bliss such as the gods rarely grant to us poor mortals.

A few minutes later and Straight, arrayed in riding kit, joined her.

"How late you are, Douglas," she said. "Have you forgotten the excursion to-day? The horses have been saddled for ever so long, and I should say breakfast was quite cold."

"Awfully sorry," he replied, kissing her, "but it couldn't be helped. I had to go round to Tortoni's for something he forgot to send. Here it is," and he pressed a small case into her hand. "Do you think I could ever forget the anniversary of the happiest day of my life?"

"A year to-day since we were married," said Margaret, "but how short it all seems." She opened the case and looked at the jewels inside.

"They are very handsome," she continued. "I have never seen such beauties." But she did not put them on.

"Don't you like the stones?" said Douglas, a little disappointed.

"It is very good of you to buy them for me to-day and, Douglas, please don't think me ungrateful, but I can't help

feeling a little superstitious. Opals are said to bring ill-luck to any one who is not born in October."

"Is that the only reason? I ought to have been better up in stone lore."

"And," said Margaret, half hesitating, "the last present Mr. Trent gave me before that dreadful day was an opal ring."

"I will change the things at once," said Douglas decidedly. "We will have nothing that can remind us of the past."

But Margaret, as she looked at the stones with their flashing fire, felt ashamed of her superstition and refused to have them returned.

They had been married quietly in Paris the year before, Margaret having completed a year's mourning for John Trent, and the time since then had been spent in a long honeymoon wandering from country to country. The winter they had spent in Australia inspecting the large property Trent had left Margaret, and, things being settled in a satisfactory manner, the happy couple had passed the early spring wandering about Italy, but always avoiding Rome, so full of unhappy associations for them both.

"Valencia proposes coming to stay with us," said Margaret, having poured out the coffee and read her letters. "This is what she says," and she read:

"DEAR OLD GIRL,—The hunting and shooting being over and nothing else of interest taking place, I propose giving Florence the benefit of my presence. It is quite time that you and Douglas had finished honeymooning, so I intend to break up your '*solitude à deux*.' Am starting to-morrow, so wire reply. If you have no room will go to hotel.—Yours, as ever, VALENCIA."

Douglas murmured something about visitors not being wanted, but Margaret interrupted him gaily:

"Nonsense! We have been so happy that it is making us selfish. I will wire to Val. at once; she and I are great friends; she is so clever and original."

So the message was dispatched and Mr. and Mrs. Straight started off for a long ride among the olive gardens and vine-covered hills of Florence.

All the morning they rode and at noon stopped to take rest at a tiny picturesque inn. Seated on a stone bench, watching the handsome buxom hostess lay their places in a tiny arbour, Margaret felt that rare sensation of perfect happiness, which is

the outcome of perfect health, congenial weather and surroundings and a contented mind.

They had led this lotos-eating life for a year now, their happiness had been unbroken, and why, like the old fairy tales, should it not continue for ever? So thought Margaret. A little chubby, dark-eyed child came and stared at the strange lady and even ventured to stroke her skirt with one small dirty finger. Its mother, the hostess's sister, came out and apologized for the *bambino*. Margaret begged that it might remain.

"Was the signora fond of children? Perhaps she had some of her own? No. That was a great hardship. Children were the greatest consolations, the best thing our Blessed Lady could send. Husbands and lovers were all faithless and unreliable. *They* went, but children remained."

In the afternoon they started again and continued their ride through the pleasant lanes till nearly sundown, when they found themselves near the quaint old village of Fiesole.

"Let us stay here for a little," said Straight. "I daresay we can get some sort of dinner and we can ride back to Florence in the evening. There is a full moon."

Margaret readily agreed. Looking at the lovely sunset and the towers of Florence in the hazy distance, she wished the day would never end; it had been one of perfect happiness, and in after years she often looked back on it.

There was quite a concourse of tourists at Fiesole. It was just Easter time, and Florence was full of English and American visitors, and the greater part of them seemed to have chosen this day to throng to Fiesole.

Douglas, who hated the ordinary set of Cook and Gaze trippers with a deadly hatred, sought for some corner where they could dine, "far from the madding crowd," and at last found a small inn which had not found favour in the eyes of the other holiday-makers. Margaret and he took their places at a small table in a balcony and in the twilight did not notice that another person had likewise taken refuge at the only other table in the place. Therefore they talked unrestrainedly and their conversation ran upon the doings of the past year and their plans for the future.

All this much interested the other person, who leant forward in the gloom in order to get a better view of the speakers.

When the waiter brought in lamps this person rose and coming up to Straight laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Do you remember me, Mr. Straight?"

"Moncrieff!" exclaimed Douglas, as he recognized the thin figure and piercing eyes of the political agent.

It was undoubtedly Moncrieff, but looking older and more careworn.

"Sit down. Awfully glad to see you. What are you doing here?"

"Existing," replied Moncrieff laconically.

"I know you well by name, Mr. Moncrieff," said Margaret. "My husband has often talked about you, and I am glad to meet you at last."

"I thank you, Mrs. Straight. Yes; your husband stayed with me in India."

"Have you left India long?" inquired Straight.

"No. I stayed till they would not have me any longer. The Rajah got dissatisfied and wanted a caretaker who allowed him to do as he liked, so he appealed. Truth is great but does not always prevail, so I was informed that the climate of Dallapore was not good for my health."

"Then you have left your beloved East for good?"

"I have left Government service; I would have none of the sops they offered me in the shape of other berths, so for the present I am laid upon the shelf. But I will not enliven your dinner by any more conversation about myself. Have you been in Florence long?"

And during the remainder of the meal the conversation turned upon purely impersonal topics.

Douglas felt all the old fascination for this man return. Moncrieff was one of the very few people who had ever interested him.

Dinner over, Margaret went indoors to talk to the innkeeper's wife, who, as a girl, had been in General Buckley's service in Florence.

Moncrieff and Straight sat and smoked.

"How have things gone with you since we last met?" inquired the political agent. "I have seen your name occasionally in the papers, and learnt from them that you had given up a diplomatic career; also that your first wife had died and that you had married again."

"Things have gone well with me; I owe a lot to you, Moncrieff. It was you that first made me see that men are not the sport of fate, and that happiness lies within one's reach."

The political agent smiled.

"So I at one time believed. And so you think you have found happiness?"

And Straight, leaning back in his chair and puffing contentedly, replied:

"Perfectly; I have all I want."

Moncrieff was silent for a few minutes and then said:

"So you may think, but in all our calculations there is an unknown quantity which we cannot account for, and which turns up and destroys everything when we least expect it. My political career is over; I have practically ceased to exist; and looking back, I see the utter futility of all ambitions and hopes—as the old Hebrew preacher said, 'all is vanity.'"

"Ah, the authorities will climb down, and be glad enough to get you back again at your own price," said Douglas, who was not in a mood to sympathize with other people's trouble. "Come and stay with us at Florence."

"Thanks. I should be like the skeleton at the Egyptian feasts. No, I shall not return to the world, no matter what they offer me. So far as the public is concerned, I have lived my life and ended it."

"Are you going to stay in Italy?"

"No; I have been to England to make final arrangements respecting my affairs, and am now on my way to the East, to live out my life in some unexplored country in the Himalayas, learning secrets undreamed of in your western philosophy. I shall never return to civilization."

"It is getting late," said Margaret, returning. "I think we ought to be starting; I have ordered the horses."

Moncrieff walked to the front of the inn to see them off.

"Good-bye," he said to Straight. "We shall not meet again; but may it be long before you wake out of your dream."

"Poor fellow," said Straight, as he overtook his wife, "they seem to have treated him pretty badly; he's awfully down on his luck. I'll look him up in a day or two."

"Yes," said Margaret, "I should like to see more of him; he seems an interesting man." And then they fell to talking on that most interesting of all topics—themselves—and all else was forgotten.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver."

Othello, Act i. Scene 3.

FRANCESCA and Pietro were betrothed. There was but one impediment to their marriage. They were both out of employment. Pietro had been discharged when Straight left Rome, and Francesca was sent back without delay as soon as the vessel on board which Alice died had reached the Bahamas.

Francesca took her character and her wages, and departed with great dignity and an evil smile.

On her return to Rome, the first visit paid by her lover and herself was to an advocate of dubious repute, but no mean ability, and after long consultation with that learned man the two departed in great good-humour.

"Basta!" cried Francesca, tossing her pretty head. "The affair is in order. We will yet have money for that wine shop in the Via Malatesta. And why not, Pietro *mio*? Has not that dog of an Englishman discharged thee for no reason, giving thee a paper that serves to no purpose? And I, do I not mourn my little mistress? *Poverina*." And the girl's eyes filled with tears, for, to do her justice, she had been warmly attached to Alice, to whose liberality indeed she mainly owed the snug sum of money which had served her beloved Pietro and herself as a stand-by in their hour of need.

Another month must elapse before Douglas Straight would return to England. Francesca and Pietro passed the interval in maturing their plans, and after receiving a letter from one of the cabin stewards on the "Grampian," Francesca sat down and composed an epistle, addressed to Straight, at his London club. The letter was brief and guarded, merely intimating that facts being within the writer's knowledge, of which the signor, in his own interests, should be made aware, she would have the honour of waiting on him on his return to London, if his lordship would indicate where his most faithful and obliged servant would find him.

When his lordship indicated by a prolonged silence that he desired to ignore the existence of his faithful servant, the latter ground her pretty teeth and used bad words of him in Roman slang.

"Pazienza! pazienza! carina," urged Pietro in his most winning tones. "The waiting game is the best. Sooner or later we shall have him. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird."

So Francesca and Pietro sat down to play the waiting game. It is not one that sweetens the temper, though it doubtless sharpens the wits and gives edge to revenge. It proved a longer affair than they had calculated on. Francesca became a regular subscriber to the *Morning Post*, which had given them the news of Straight's second marriage; and through its fashionable columns she traced the wanderings of the newly-wedded pair, Vienna, Paris, the Riviera, then losing sight of them from time to time, when they left the haunts of civilization and wandered in unfrequented paths.

Francesca got a place, but her quick temper lost it very soon.

Pietro earned a few odd *lire* as a guide. On the whole they were not a happy pair of lovers.

As her savings grew less, the prospective capital to be drawn from Douglas Straight grew larger in the calculative mind of Francesca.

She brooded over her wrongs and those of her departed mistress and her present lover, until a heavy debit balance stood entered against the wrong-doer.

In her lighter moods Francesca would sketch the comfortable profits to accrue from the wine shop in the Via Malatesta, but on the whole Pietro was not sorry when the long-looked-for information was received from a private inquiry agent.

Francesca wrote briefly and to the point:

"Your happiness, your life, are in my hands. There is a proverb, 'Speech is silver, but silence is gold.'

"Vossignoria has wit enough to take my meaning, and, if prudent, will, on receipt of this, ask to see me without delay."

No answer came to this, and Francesca, dressed with much care, left her lodging in the Via Santa Croce.

Margaret sat at the window of their pretty room on the Lung' Arno delle Grazie. As she looked across the river, past the quaint old Ponte Vecchio, on to the Boboli Gardens and the sun-lit hills beyond, she thought of her first meeting with Douglas and the long talks of Florence during that careless voyage. There was a gloomy interval in the middle distance. She preferred not to think of that. The present and the future were bright with a perfect happiness; let that suffice.

"A young woman wishes to see the signora. She will not give her name or business; she is very urgent."

"There must be some mistake. Did she ask for me by name?"

"Yes, by name. She is a well-dressed and respectable person."

"Oh, some maid in search of a place, I suppose. Show her up."

When Francesca entered Margaret recognized Alice's former maid and exclaimed:

"Why so much mystery, Francesca? I was nearly refusing to see you. And what brings you to Florence?"

"The mystery is none of my making, and the business affects you," replied the girl curtly.

"Affects me?"

"Yes; or your husband, rather; it is the same thing. He did not answer my letter."

"You are talking in a strange manner, Francesca. I must ask you to remember yourself."

"I will tell you the whole story, signora," retorted Francesca, suddenly bursting into a torrent of words. "It is not my fault if I hurt you. Twice have I written to the signor. Silence. No reply. On his head be it! You knew his first wife and her failing. Do you know how she died? From general collapse due to intemperance. Not a bit. Your husband put the poison in her way. Poison, I call it, for spirits were poison to her. He got rid of her to marry you. I know it, the cabin steward knew it; but the signora begged and prayed us not to stop the supply. And then, when I knew it, it was but a question of days. We let her have her way. Oh! he was very clever, but he got a little careless towards the end. Very clever, very clever, but a little careless, and the lawyers call it murder."

"I have come to tell you this and to name my price. Twenty-five thousand lire, and I hold my tongue. That is nothing to you, and silence is not dear at the price. Do you understand? You are the wife of a murderer, and he murdered his first wife to marry you."

Douglas Straight, returning from a casual stroll on the Lung' Arno, was attracted by the shrill tones of a woman's voice upstairs. He ran up the steps and entered his wife's boudoir. Francesca was standing over her hissing out the last words like an angry snake, while Margaret sat, half-starting from her chair, with her eyes glazed with a glassy stare and her features drawn and white as though turned to stone.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Fare thee well ! and if for ever,
Still for ever, *fare thee well.*"—Byron.

STRAIGHT surveyed the scene for a few seconds and wondered what had happened. Then he gradually recognized Francesca's face, and the remembrance of the two letters received and burnt as soon as read came over him. He grasped the situation at once. Taking Francesca by the shoulders he thrust her bodily out of the room.

"If you ever dare set foot in this house again or speak to the signora, I will have you turned out by the *guardia*, and I will also prosecute your lover for those studs he stole while in my service."

Francesca in a shrill voice began to protest.

"Silence," thundered Straight. "You have, in order to get money, frightened the signora with your ridiculous trumped-up story. You cannot frighten me."

"You killed her. You supplied her with drink when the doctor forbade it," interrupted the girl.

Straight, still holding her wrists tightly, continued :

"I intend prosecuting both you and your lover for attempts to blackmail, and even supposing your ridiculous story to be true, by offering to keep silence for money you are compounding a felony, and are liable to many years' imprisonment."

Francesca began another sentence, but there was a look on Straight's face she did not like, and the exercise of brute force cowed her.

"The signor has the *jettatura*," she said, covering her face.

"True," said Straight grimly, loosing her hands, "I will overlook you and yours, to ——"

But without waiting to hear the curse, Francesca fled, and did not stop until she had put the length of the street between the evil eye and herself. When she at last paused to take breath, she reflected that it would be best to consult Pietro before returning to the attack.

Straight re-entered the room. Margaret had not moved from the chair ; he went up to her and took her hands in his, but she drew them hastily away.

"What is the matter, my darling ?" he asked. "Surely you paid no attention to anything that mad woman said." But she shrank further from him.

"Don't come near me, Douglas, for God's sake. Don't touch me. Oh, it is true; you can't deny it."

"True! What is true? I have heard nothing yet."

"About your wife. You let her drink herself to death. You supplied her with spirits when the doctors had forbidden her to have any. The maid knows it. The cabin steward knows it. And then you came to me and let me think she had died a natural death."

Douglas looked at Margaret, and as he did so felt it would be useless to deny it. His only hope would be to throw himself on her mercy.

"You don't speak," she continued; "you don't attempt to deny it! However much you did, I should not believe you. Oh! it is cruel, cruel. You have brought nothing but misery into my life since the first day we met. Why could you not have left me to live out my life after that dreadful time in Rome? Why did you follow me and bring all this fresh trouble upon me?"

"I loved you, Margaret. I could not live without you!"

"Love! And you have made me a murderer's wife."

"That is a hard name, and untrue. I am not a murderer."

"Not murder! By what name do you call the act of killing a woman in cold blood?"

"You know my life had been made a hell upon earth, and that it was only a question of months as to my wretched wife's life. I did not give her drink. Left to herself she would probably have died long before. Indeed, I did everything to prevent her getting it. By her own special request the attendant was sent away."

"Of what use are these quibbles? You did not actually pour the poison down her throat, but you placed what was poison to her within her reach. If not legally murder, it is so practically."

"Margaret, listen!" and Straight again tried to take her hands.

"Don't touch me! Leave me, for heaven's sake; and to my dying day I hope I shall never see you again."

"Margaret! My wife! You will not desert me?"

"Desert you! I will never see you again as long as I live. From this day you are dead to me. Go!"

"I will go now if you wish it, my darling. But give me some hope for the future. Anything I have done has been done for love of you. I will do whatever you wish, even to leaving you; but at least say that you will let me hear sometimes."

Margaret shook her head.

"All that is over. I can never be anything to you again. Any attempt to communicate with me will be worse than useless. If you will not leave me at once I must go." And she got up and went towards the door.

"No," exclaimed Douglas, seizing her hands, "I will not drive you out of the house. I will go as you tell me, and I will not trouble you in any way till the day when you can tell me you forgive me."

He kissed her passionately.

"Remember this, my darling. I have always loved you, and though I never see you again I shall love you to the last day of my life."

He dropped her hands and hurried out of the room.

"It was the only way," thought Straight to himself, as an hour later he paced up and down the station waiting for his train. "It is no good trying to argue with a woman, and Margaret is so determined she would only have gone herself if I had remained, and that would have made her hate me. As it is she will miss me, and before very long she will come to her senses and see things in a reasonable light. But that meddling fool Francesca!" and Straight set his teeth and mentally consigned her to the lowest circle of the infernal regions.

Two days later Margaret received a telegram telling her that Straight had reached England, and was for the present residing at Harborough House.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"One event happeneth to them all."—*Eccles. ii. 14.*

SIX weeks had passed, and Margaret had been fighting the bitterest of all fights, that between love and duty. For a time her abhorrence of the crime that had shortened Alice Lorrimer's life upheld her in her resolve. Douglas had practically murdered his first wife with a view to make her, Margaret Trent, his second. Oh! it was too horrible, and she hid her face in her hands.

Time, the great healer, the deadener, the obliterator, passed on. The position rose in less sharp outlines to her mental view. After all, he had not actually killed his wife. He had only yielded, and that after her urgent entreaties, to the cravings of a

dypsomaniac, and shortened by so doing a miserable existence, forfeit beforehand to a hereditary curse.

Yes, perhaps that was so. Yet it was done always with one object in view—to make her take the dead woman's place.

She could have no more to do with the man who had thus debased her. From henceforth they must be as dead to one another.

Margaret looked out of the window and across the soft summer landscape. From the little house which for some weeks had been her home she looked out on the downs, sloping away in gentle curves against the background formed by the low Wiltshire hills with their tints of blueish grey. Through the rich green meadows a stream slowly wound its way along the valley. Over all hung a slight silvery mist.

Something of the peace of the pleasant scene stole into Margaret's heart.

Half unconsciously she thought of him with whom during twelve months of perfect happiness she had travelled through some of the world's most pleasant paths.

The man who had debased her! She shrank from the condemnation she herself had uttered. The words of a half-remembered childish lesson floated into her memory, "Mercy and not sacrifice." Surely that was a divine command. He had sinned, yet who was she to judge him? Was it her duty to sacrifice the whole of his future to her want of mercy? Was it not rather her place to lead him by kindness to repentance; and if by her unkindness he was driven to despair and sank to the lowest depths, would not his sins be upon her head?

Thus argued Love, and the voice of Duty grew fainter, sunk into a whisper, and ceased to be heard.

The day turned to twilight, the twilight gave place to night, and Margaret never stirred, but sat gazing out into the darkness, heeding nothing. The clock from a neighbouring church struck an hour, she did not count what. Six weeks since she had last seen Douglas! It seemed more like six years, or six hundred. Could she endure it? To live out her life separated from the man she loved. Death would be preferable, yet hardly probable, as she was young and strong. Suddenly she started as a passing bat brushed across her face. Her mind was made up. Let the past keep its secrets, let the dead bury its dead. She would go

back to the man she loved, to the man who loved her more than all the world.

Love had conquered.

Early next morning Margaret got up and wrote and dispatched a telegram to Valencia Straight. Harborough House was only some forty miles away, in the neighbouring county of Hampshire. She would be there that afternoon. The necessary orders were soon given and the baggage packed. A mid-day train took her to Andover, and there she had to change. During the twenty minutes that she had to wait, Margaret paced slowly up and down thinking of her approaching meeting with Douglas. It was pleasant to look forward to. She conjured it up vividly in her own mind, and smiled softly as she dwelt on it. Then a down train came in with some London papers.

The bookstall boys took them leisurely and shook out the great news bills. They take events tranquilly at country stations.

Margaret watched the boys, half lost in her own thoughts. She had no need of papers and their idle chit-chat. Only one thing in life had interest for her.

The paper-boy came sauntering down the platform shouting out the news:

"Libel action against an M.P. Result of the Hastings election petition. German reverses in West Africa! Horrible accident at Seaford! Horrible accident to an earl's son!"

With a mixed feeling of curiosity and apprehension Margaret bought a copy of the paper and read the following paragraph:

"Yesterday evening a dead body was discovered on the beach beneath the cliffs at Seaford, Sussex. It was identified by some officers of the garrison as that of the Honourable Douglas Straight, eldest son of Viscount Harborough. The unfortunate gentleman had been dining with Captain Scott, late R.N., at his house above the town, and it is presumed that in the dark he missed his path and was precipitated over the cliff. Indications on the spot tend to show that the deceased had dragged himself some hundred yards along the beach in a vain endeavour to reach the town. Life was quite extinct when the body was found."

THE END.

LONDON SOCIETY.

CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

1895.

R. S. V. P.

By "RITA,"

Author of "SHEBA," "PEG THE RAKE," etc., etc.

"So odd he hasn't replied," said Lady Sangfroid.

"African travellers are apt to forget conventionalities," observed her husband over his *Times*. "After all, my dear, you will have lions enough to roar the roof down. You won't miss one out of the jungle."

Lady Sangfroid glanced at the top of a bald head and the political sheet of the *Times* with the contempt a clever woman, a popular woman, and a society success would naturally feel for a mere husband—a husband, too, who was harmless, prosy, and had let her "have her head" in everything.

That permission had led to many outbursts of eccentricity on her part, but they were comparatively respectable and had not, as yet, led her into serious mischief—or occasioned her lord and master, who was twenty years her senior, any heartburnings. Her present craze was to secure for her "at homes" the very latest, greatest, and most celebrated celebrity of the day, whatever sex, *status*, or character the said celebrity possessed.

There are plenty of women in society with the same ambition, and Lady Sangfroid had as much as she could do to be first in the field.

Hence her discomposure at the present moment. The great African explorer, Julian Chase, had only recently arrived in town after seven years' absence. He had made wonderful discoveries, which every one talked of and very few cared about. His name was figuring in every newspaper, and his photograph in every stationer's window.

He had fought with beasts and men. He had lion skins and tiger skins galore; he had found gold and diamond mines, and new rivers and new routes, and had come home with pockets

CHRIS.

full of plans and papers, and a brain full of suggestions. He was bronzed and tanned; his hair was long, his voice unmodulated; he shook hands at a natural instead of unnatural elevation, and spoke his mind out as regarded the dyed hair and rouge and powder, which gave a Piccadilly Circus appearance to most drawing-rooms. He had even been heard to say that he preferred the Kaffir women to the modern society belle, with her artificial complexion, her slang and smartness, her craze for cycling and golfing, and her utter unfemininity. All these things, of course, proved Julian Chase to be very much behind the times; but they did not interfere with his novelty and popularity, or prevent women fighting for introductions, and overwhelming him with cards for their dinners and "at homes."

As yet, however, no one had managed to secure him, except the Geographical Society, and a few Foreign Office people, and the present head of the Cabinet.

Naturally, Lady Sangfroid was anxious that he should be seen in her drawing-rooms, and went to work diplomatically to secure his presence. Lord Sangfroid was a harmless and useful member of the Cabinet, and had been entreated to do his best to bring the new star to shine at his wife's table and entertain her guests, and in so far as a great man and a political dignitary might unbend, he had unbent, and asked the favour of Julian Chase's presence at this big "at home," where, as he had said, many lions were to roar and much entertainment might be expected.

Verbally, Julian Chase had said he would try to be present, but the significant "R. S. V. P." of Lady Sangfroid's invitation card had escaped his notice apparently. In any case he had not answered it, and on the very morning of the party Lady Sangfroid was ignorant as to whether this one special lion would be lifting his voice among the others or not.

"I told Lady Flitterley he would be here," she went on presently, "and she seemed quite incredulous, and if he doesn't come, how she will crow over me."

Lady Flitterley was her dearest friend and most daring rival, from a candle-shade to a cycling match; from the latest thing in tyres to the last mode of skirt pleats. They copied, adored and abused each other as only dear friends are privileged to do, and the thought of Maud Flitterley's triumph at her non-success was a bitter drop in Lady Sangfroid's cup of promised triumph.

If he had only answered!

Of course there was still hope that he might come in spite of that ignored R. S. V. P. He might not have observed those initials. It was even not quite impossible that he might not have understood their meaning. Seven years among Kaffirs and savages might well blunt the senses and obscure the intellect. Lord Sangfroid had said that travellers were apt to become oblivious to conventionalities; perhaps Julian Chase was only oblivious.

"At all events," she went on, addressing the *Times*, "Helen Hayes has promised to come, and her singing will compensate for a good deal. It's perfectly wonderful how popular she is, isn't it?"

"Yes, she's a plucky little woman," said Lord Sangfroid. "I suppose no one knows if that brute of a husband has departed this life for a—worse—yet?"

"No; she is not a woman to talk about private affairs unnecessarily. She is very reserved."

"She is very beautiful—and very clever at all events," observed Lord Sangfroid, laying down the *Times*.

"Oh, well," said his wife deprecatingly, "she is well enough. Myself I don't admire red hair."

"Red! that glorious, golden, ruddy tangle *red*! My dear Ursula! how uncharitable you women are!"

"And how blind you men! Helen's hair *is* red—decidedly. Titianesque, if you like, but, all the same, more red than gold. Not but what it suits her, and her skin is really very good—a little too white, perhaps, but——"

"Oh! for goodness' sake give nature the credit she deserves, Ursula," exclaimed Lord Sangfroid. "Mrs. Hayes' complexion is beautiful, and all her own too! She makes most of your society belles look vulgar beside her."

"Dear me, Herbert, I had no idea you were such an ardent admirer of Helen's."

"A man can't help seeing whether a woman is good-looking or not, and lately one seems to meet Mrs. Hayes everywhere."

"Yes, that *mezza voce* style of hers has taken immensely. It has only one drawback; people can't talk while she sings. Fortunately she always chooses those funny little foreign songs—so short and quaint."

"I don't like them," said Lord Sangfroid. "Give me an English ballad for choice."

His wife looked at him with serene contempt, and gathered up her letters.

"I have a hundred things to do and look after," she said. "Will you dine at the House to-night, or at the club?"

"I must be at the House," he answered. "I shall dine there. I daresay I can get away by ten o'clock, though."

"Oh, *do!*" exclaimed his wife. "Remember I don't know Julian Chase at all except by those photographs, in which he looks like a Kaffir chief himself. It would be awkward if you weren't here to introduce him."

"I don't expect he will come," said Lord Sangfroid reassuringly, as he left the room.

* * * * *

Later on that evening Lady Sangfroid was receiving her guests in the small drawing-room of her Berkeley Square mansion, and watching satin trains and black coats pass on to the suite of reception rooms beyond.

There were many notable, and beautiful, and illustrious persons present, and the rooms filled rapidly, but still that one guest she so eagerly desired had not appeared.

"Where's the African?" whispered Lady Flitterley in her ear as she paused beside her for a few moments. "Not come yet? Oh, I hardly expect he will. He is always disappointing."

Lady Sangfroid felt annoyed. It is only one's dearest friend who is privileged to say disagreeable things, and takes advantage of the privilege.

"Ah! here's Helen," she exclaimed, and turned eagerly to an exceedingly beautiful woman who was coming slowly through the throng on the staircase. Her rich ruddy hair was twisted in a thick loose knot at the back of her head. Her gown, of white satin, was cut and draped in an artistic fashion, that made most other gowns look like the designs of Pilotell, or *Le Monde Illustré*. Mrs. Helen Hayes was a woman with original ideas, and had the courage to carry them out. In consequence, she always looked distinguished when other women were mere copies or reproductions of each other.

The stream of guests at last ceased to flow up the wide stair-

case, and Lady Sangfroid left her receiving post and entered the music room. A great Swedish violinist was playing, and people were in doubt as to whether his antics, his hair, or his performance was the most remarkable.

As he concluded two French actors gave a duologue from a new comedy recently produced at the Variétés in Paris. It was *piquante* and *risqué* enough to enchain all attention, and no one noticed a bronzed, foreign-looking man enter quietly at the back of the room, and drop into a vacant chair, partly shaded by a gigantic palm. He listened to the witty dialogue and the *double entendres* with some surprise and no little scorn. His brilliant eyes roved from face to face as if asking what attraction or interest kept them smiling and eager to the conclusion of the piece. He shrank back in his corner. The great palm screened him from observation. He wondered a little why he had come here. Suddenly there was a faint stir and rustle among the crowd. He saw a woman moving slowly towards the platform on which the Erard grand stood.

He looked, and it seemed to him as if his brain grew suddenly dizzy. The room and the crowd, the lights and flowers and faces swam before his sight in mazy circles. A murmur went up about him. "Helen Hayes! Oh, she's going to sing." And then a hush and silence fell upon them all, and the mists cleared from his sight, and he found himself gazing at that white graceful figure with its lovely crown of hair, and soft, appealing eyes, and felt his heart throb and quiver as her low thrilling voice stole over the silence of the room. He heard every word.

"Can I teach thee, my beloved ;

Can I teach thee ?

If I said go left or right,

The counsel would be light,

The wisdom poor of all that could enrich thee,

My right would be as left,

My raising would depress thee,

My chain of light would blind thee

Of way—would lead behind thee,

Of end would leave bereft.

Alas ! I can but love thee.

May God teach thee, my beloved ;

May God teach thee !

• • • • •

Can I love thee, my beloved,
Can I love thee?
And is this like love to stand
With my help in my hand?
When, strong as death, I fain would watch above thee,
My love kiss can deny
No tear that falls beneath it,
My oath of love can swear thee
From no evil that comes near thee,
And thou diest while I breathe it;
And I—I can but die!
May God love thee, my beloved;
May God love thee."

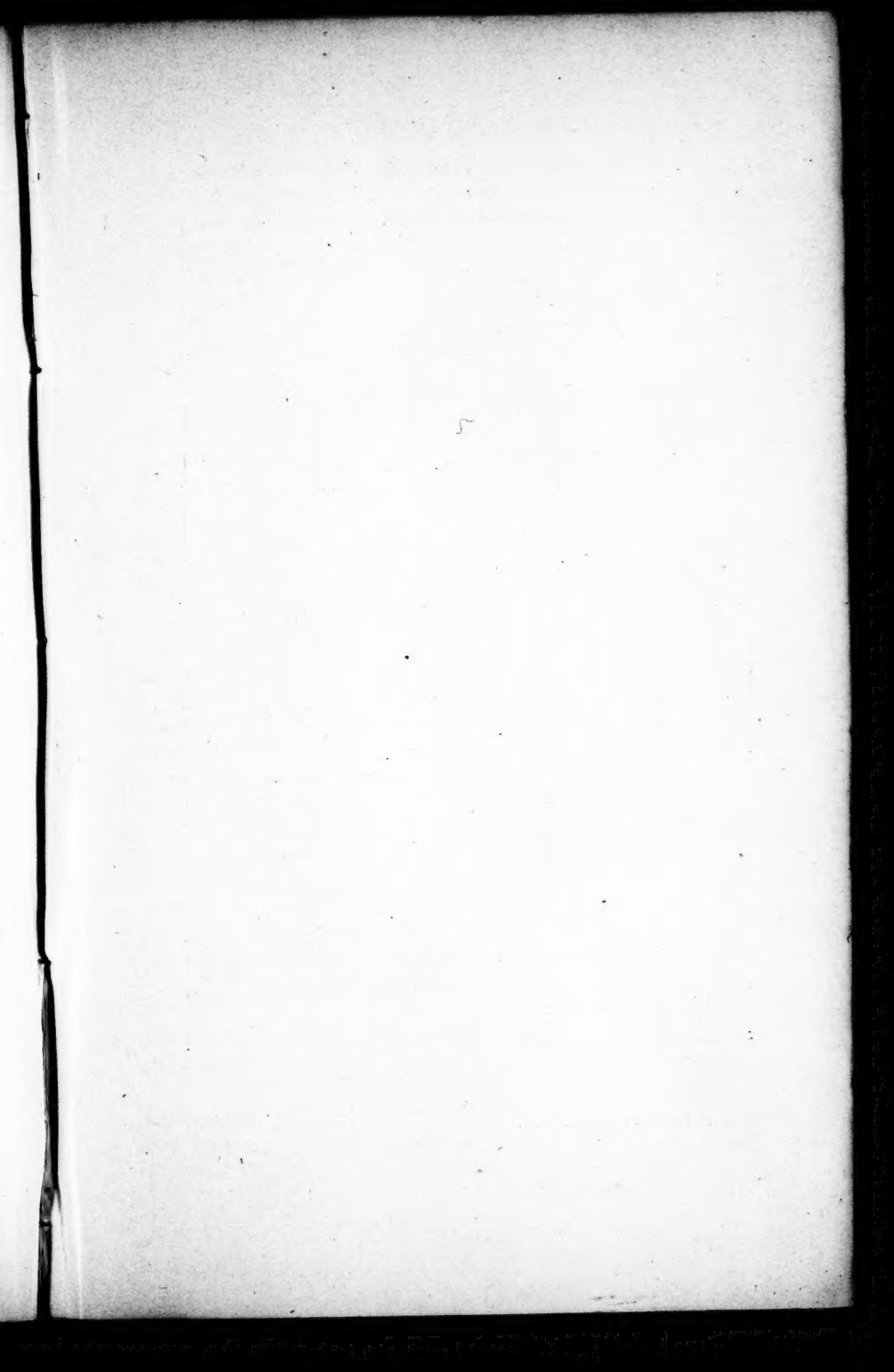
He felt a strange choking sensation in his throat as the lovely voice thrilled out in plaintive sadness. He saw her through remembering eyes, and wondered what had chanced in these long years of silence and separation. Why was she singing here? why was her name on every tongue, criticized or praised according to the mind or mood of the speaker, but banded to and fro with the familiarity that makes art at once a terror and a joy to the artist?

She passed from his sight, and it seemed as if the room grew suddenly dark and empty. When he caught sight of her again, she was surrounded by men, all eager for a word or a smile. Her singing had been the fashion for a season. In all probability some one else, or something else, would have outrivalled her before another came round. Society cannot afford to be constant. It likes a new fashion in artists and amusements, as it insists on a new *mode* in gowns and bonnets.

Helen Hayes knew this only too well. She estimated her success at its true worth, and never expected it to last. Perhaps in some dark hour of despondency she asked herself what she should do when it was over. She a deserted wife, with all the gifts of youth and beauty and genius only strewing her path with dangers, and leaving her heart-sick and alone in a world that is pitiless and cold to trouble.

She drew herself away from the crowd of flatterers at last, and passed into an adjacent corridor, full of artful nooks, and softly shaded lights, and cushioned seats.

She sank down on one of the seats, the furthest and dimmest. She was tired and miserable; she would have to sing again soon, and wanted to quiet her nerves before what was always more or less of an ordeal to her.





"JULIAN—YOU!" SHE HALF WHISPERED.

R.S.V.P.

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"I suppose," suddenly said a voice beside her, "that you have quite forgotten me?"

She started and looked up. Her face grew as white as her gown.

"Julian—you!" she half whispered.

He sat down beside her.

"Yes, Helen. Who would have thought we should meet like this? and yet Paris and London are not so far apart."

"I have left Paris," she said, "years ago. But you—I thought——"

"You do not read your *Times*," he said, "or you would have known I had returned from Africa."

Then they looked at each other long and steadily, reading with aching hearts the change in each face, wondering that pain should be so long-lived, and joy so short.

Silence grew painful. She broke it first.

"A great deal has happened," she said. "I have become a professional singer; and you——"

"A professional explorer," he said bitterly. "A discoverer of ruins and rivers; of strange tribes and strange countries; a man who holds his life in his hand, and values it so little that Fate takes extra care of it. That is what life and—a woman—have made of me."

She grew even paler, and the hand that held her fan trembled.

"I thought you would have forgotten—long ago," she said.

"Is nothing changed?" he asked abruptly. "Are you still chained to that——"

"Hush! I know what you would say. Yes. . . . it is just the same. Only he has left me. I am thankful for that. I can earn my own living, and people have been very kind to me. I am not unhappy. I have plenty to occupy me, and——"

He almost groaned.

"Don't," he said. "It breaks my heart to think of you working—waiting on the caprices of society—of the misery of this heartless world."

"It is the very best thing that could have happened," she said. "Work is the only cure for unhappiness. Idle women are bound to suffer, or to sin. Their own misery drives them to it. You should be thankful."

"I cannot be thankful for anything that makes you suffer," he said. "And your face tells me what these years have meant."

"Yes, they have not been altogether pleasant," she said with some bitterness. "But do not let us talk of them; tell me how it is you come here, and how you recognized me so quickly."

"When a face is graven on one's heart," he said, "it is easy enough to recognize it even under the garb of a change of fashion."

"How bitterly you speak——"

"Oh, Helen!" he said passionately. "Don't let us fence with each other. You are more beautiful than ever. You have added to your beauty the additional charm of celebrity, and I—I have done all a man may to forget you, and assured myself I had succeeded; and then I step into a London drawing-room after seven years of exile and peril, and I hear your voice and see your face, and know—— Well, I might have spared myself the exile and the perils, too, for they have not cured me after all!"

She trembled, and a soft flush warmed the whiteness of her face.

These words were so sweet, so welcome; and yet so fraught with peril.

She felt she could not speak. Why should she rebuke a constancy her own heart echoed? Why pretend that she grieved for what only gladdened her?

Not all the lessons of the world can teach a woman to deceive herself, even if she succeeds in deceiving the man who loves her. Let her wander as she will through the maze of falsehood and pretence, hypocrisy and excitement, her soul brings her at last to the only egress, and shows her her true self—waiting.

So Helen Hayes listened and was glad. For seven years life had been all discord and turmoil. Now harmony reigned once more, and her heart grew hushed, and the world seemed no longer a desert, but a fair garden of promise.

It was a brief halt by the wayside, a rest in the hot noon under cool shade, sweet with the murmur of rustling grasses, and birds' songs, and scents of flowers.

In such moments one forgets to be conventional.

Fate offers the key of the prison-house, and who is strong enough to refuse it?

They sit there unheeded and forgotten, while the lions roared around them, and the crowd chattered and gossiped, and flirted.

and feasted? Among so many attractions Helen was not missed and as for the African explorer no one knew he had come. A few chance couples glanced at them from time to time, half envious of that rose-shaded recess, half curious as to that long *tête-à-tête*, and all the time the fate of two lives hung in the balance, and the good and evil angels of a woman's destiny hovered over that dim alcove.

"I have to sing again," she said at last with a faint sigh. "I must earn my guineas, you know."

"And it is for this," he answered, "that I have left Africa."

"Are you so sorry you came here," she asked, "that we met again?"

"I shall be sorry to-morrow," he said. "It is strange that I so resolutely set myself against all parties and social functions, and yet to-night something seemed to drag me here Do you know I have not even spoken to my hostess. I don't know who she is."

"That is no uncommon event at London parties," she said with a faint smile. "It has often happened to me."

"You are going? and you haven't told me where you live—if I may call on you?"

She had risen. The faint rose-light fell on her splendid hair, and the rich lustre of her satin gown.

"It would be better not," she said. "Surely we are old enough and wise enough to know that only harm ever comes of tampering with temptation."

He rose too.

"I shall go back to Africa," he said.

She half turned aside; the tears had sprung suddenly to her eyes. Her heart seemed to cease beating.

"It is a long way," she said vaguely. "But perhaps it would be best."

At the same moment Lady Sangfroid appeared; she seemed searching for some one. Her short-sighted eyes gazed through her long-handled glasses; her full fluted satin skirts rustled loudly.

"Ah, Helen!" she exclaimed, and then paused. "I was looking for you, my dear. We would like your other song now—before supper, if you don't mind?"

Then she glanced at Julian Chase. She wondered who he was.

Mrs. Hayes noted the glance. Her face grew warm.

"Julian," she said, "let me present you to Lady Sangfroid."

They bowed.

"A—a friend of yours, Helen?" asked Lady Sangfroid, as they turned away.

"A very old friend," she said sadly. "We have not met for years. It was so strange meeting him here. He has been abroad—in Africa."

"Africa!" Lady Sangfroid started and paused.

"What name did you say? I did not catch it," she exclaimed.

"His name," said Helen quietly, "is Julian Chase."

Lady Sangfroid gave a little scream.

"What! The great African explorer! and he has been here all this time and I never knew—and every one asking for him! Oh, Helen, I shall never forgive you!"

Helen looked bewildered. "It was not my fault," she said. "He came up when I was sitting on that seat. I did not know you set such store on his appearance. To me he was only my old friend Julian."

Lady Sangfroid wrung her hands desperately, and turned back and rushed down the long corridor with all the speed that fourteen stone supported on Louis Quinze heels could achieve.

The alcove was empty.

She searched in vain for the African traveller. He appeared no more that night. She moved to and fro among her guests, telling them distressedly of that distinguished person's presence and departure. Some condoled with her—the majority looked incredulous, and Helen Hayes' sweet low tones vibrated on inattentive ears as she sang her last song:

"Thou art gone from my gaze."

• • • • •

But London society saw no more of the great African explorer.

The Abbess's Wish.

By DARLEY DALE,
Author of "THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH," etc.

IT was a long time ago, before modern woman was born, in the days when revolting daughters were not, but when the nature of woman was very much the same as it is at present, that the Abbess of Maryford Abbey lived. She was a handsome woman, though her youth was gone, when the great wish of her heart, the darling ambition of her life, was gratified. The wish was strongest just when it was fulfilled; it was as if the strength of the wish compelled its fulfilment. This happens sometimes; when it does, the wisher would do better to tremble than to rejoice. Safer is it to rejoice when a wish is fulfilled after the wisher has ceased to wish it, as happens very often in a world where sadness as well as joy has its place.

The abbess was clever as well as handsome; but like many other clever people, she had not much common-sense, and from the contemplative and introspective life which she led her imagination, which was naturally quick, was more cultivated than her intellect and dominated her other powers.

She was a good woman, very devout, very popular amongst her nuns, a considerate ruler erring on the side of leniency rather than of severity, quick in sympathy if also quick in temper, with strong affections, greatly loving and greatly beloved.

She was a very happy woman; her life was a busy one, and full of interests; it satisfied her wholly. There was a strong vein of asceticism in her nature, that took pleasure in the life of penance and mortification which the rule of her order prescribed; and she was often heard to say she had but one wish ungratified.

Probably had the abbess belonged to an active instead of to a contemplative order, this wish would never have gained such an ascendancy over her, for she would have been too busy to indulge it. It grew so strong that it became matter for confession, or the abbess thought, perhaps unconsciously, that confession was the only means through which she could hope to attain her end.

At any rate, she confided it to good Father John, who for the last ten years had been the nuns' chaplain and confessor in ordinary, which means that they, like all other nuns, had another confessor, called extraordinary, every three months.

It was to Father John that the abbess, time after time, confessed this wish, which had become so strong that she felt she could never be perfectly satisfied, perfectly happy; life would never yield its fullest joy to her till this wish was gratified. Here she was at the summit of her career; she could never be more than abbess, unless she grew to be a saint, and she allowed this wish to disturb the calm peacefulness of her life.

In vain did Father John assure her it was a temptation of the devil, and must 'be treated as such; in vain did he prescribe penances: the abbess performed the penance, and wished all the more passionately; in vain did he assure her it could not be granted: the abbess insisted that it could, if only he would apply to Rome for leave to grant this wish, which she only dared whisper in the confessional.

It was not a wicked wish in itself, it was a foolish one, and the mischief of it was, the abbess let it get such ascendancy over her, and occupy her thoughts so much, that her spiritual life was disturbed by it. She belonged to an enclosed order, but the wish had nothing to do with any desire to go beyond the limits of her enclosure. Her rule forbade her to touch flesh meat, and obliged her to get up every night to say matins and lauds, summer and winter, and many other things hard to flesh and blood did it demand; but it was not relaxation of any of these things that she desired. No, her wish was to hear confessions. Now as abbess her duty was to preside at the weekly chapter of faults, where every nun is obliged publicly to confess her breaches of the rule of the order; one would have thought this would have been enough for the abbess; but no! her ambition was to sit in the priest's place and hear the confession of sins as he does, and nothing short of this would satisfy her.

For a whole year after she first told Father John about it this wish held sway over her; for some time he forbade her to mention it to him at all, but it was all no use, the wish remained, and the abbess's prayers, that it might be granted, were more fervent than ever.

"Do write to Rome and ask leave, father."

"It is impossible, for this reason, if for no other. I am quite certain of this: you could not keep the secrecy inviolate; no woman could," said Father John.

"Oh! but, father, I am quite certain I could; I have often kept secrets; see how many my nuns confide to me, and this is quite different; I am sure I could keep it!"

"And I am equally sure you can't; but as this absurd wish has become a positive pest to your soul, I'll speak to the bishop about it and see what can be done. Next week I'll tell you the result," said Father John, and the abbess retired beaming with delight.

The week seemed interminable to her, so anxious was she to know the result of the priest's application to the bishop. At last Saturday came round, and the abbess went in her turn to the confessional; when she had finished her confession, Father John told her he had seen the bishop, and obtained leave for her to hear one confession. Overjoyed at the news, the abbess proffered her thanks, and begged to know whose confession she was to hear, and when.

"Mine, and now," said Father John. "We will change places, if you please, and remember, if you break the seal of the confessional, you will never be allowed to hear another confession."

The abbess was rather taken aback at this; she would greatly have preferred to hear some one else, for she had a great reverence for Father John, and did not want him to suffer mortification to gratify her whim. However, Father John was very firm about it; she must hear him or no one, now or never; accordingly the abbess yielded and she took his seat, while he went behind the curtain, knelt down and made his confession.

The abbess sat and listened, and came to the conclusion that she would rather make ten confessions herself than listen to one from such a saintly man as Father John; when suddenly she received such a shock, that to her dying day she never remembered how she got out of the confessional.

"And now," said the penitent at her feet, "I must tell you I am not a priest; I am a humbug, an impostor, a sham priest; therefore I need not add that all my ministrations here are of no avail. That's all I have to confess. There, my daughter, now your wish is gratified. Go, and remember it is a mortal sin even to think of what has been confessed to you."

The abbess staggered to her seat in the chapel, and remained for nearly an hour, crushed down under the awful blow which had fallen upon her ; here was she responsible for the souls of the sisters, aware that the man who pretended to say mass for them every day, and to absolve them every week, was no priest at all, but an impostor. What was she to do ? Clearly, such a scandal could not be allowed to go on ; a stop must be put to it at once, but how ! That was the question.

And the abbess's answer was to go to her cell and send for the novice-mistress, and take counsel with her. To do so it was of course necessary to tell the whole story, and the abbess took great credit to herself for the scrupulous way in which she avoided mentioning any one of the peccadilloes of the week which Father John had confessed to her. No priest, she was sure, could have kept the seal of confession more sacredly than she was doing ; meanwhile, what did the novice-mistress advise ?

The novice-mistress decreed that never, never again must the impostor Father John be suffered to cross the threshold of the convent ; never should he pretend to say mass in their chapel, or hear their confessions again.

"How are we to prevent him ?" said the abbess.

"Sister Monica must refuse to admit him to-morrow when he comes to say mass, and you, dear mother, should, I think, write to the bishop to-night and tell him, and beg him to give us another chaplain," said the novice-mistress.

"What reason are we to give Sister Monica ? She would scarcely dare to refuse to admit Father John even under obedience."

"You must tell her the truth, I think," said the novice-mistress. So Sister Monica, who was a lay-sister and the portress, was sent for and told the story, and before the lay-sisters' recreation was over that evening, they all knew that Father John was an impostor.

And at the novices' recreation, the novice-mistress told all of them the sad news, and at the choir-sisters' recreation the abbess confided to them the awful scandal that had fallen upon them ; and before they went to bed that night, there was not a soul, except a poor deaf and dumb girl, in that convent that did not know of Father John's wickedness.

But the abbess faithfully kept all the first part of his con-

fession, the faults of the week ; she was surprised to find how easy it was not to remember them.

The news caused great grief, for they were all devoted to Father John, and when they went to compline there was hardly a dry eye in the chapel ; some few feigned not to believe it, but they were speedily sat upon, and told not to doubt what had been confided to their lady abbess under the solemn seal of confession.

Sister Monica was the most concerned, for on her devolved the task of refusing admittance to Father John the next morning ; she was an Irish nun, tall and strong, with bright eyes and a good-humoured face ; she had plenty of common-sense and fulfilled the duties of portress excellently, knowing exactly how to deal with the various beggars who besieged the convent. It was in fear and trembling that she opened the door at seven o'clock the next morning to this wicked man, who for ten years had practised so terrible a deception on these poor nuns.

Once every three months they had been absolved by a real priest, or they would indeed have been in parlous case ; it was this thought only that drew the curtain of sleep before their eyes the night they learnt the awful trick that had been practised upon them.

Father John was in a measure prepared for what awaited him, for he met the boy who served his mass just outside the convent.

"Good morning, father. Sister Monica told me there is no mass this morning," said the boy.

"Sister Monica is mistaken ; I am now going to say mass. Come back and serve," said Father John, and with the boy at his heels he rang the convent bell.

Sister Monica opened the door, but only half way, and instead of kneeling, as usual, for Father John's blessing she put out her hands and exclaimed :

"Go away, go away, you bad, wicked man ; we don't want any sham priests here. Shure and I wonder you aren't afraid to show your face, after what ye confessed to the reverend-mother yesterday."

Father John showed no signs of fear ; there was a merry twinkle in his dark eyes, and a calm dignity in his manner, as he gently put the portress aside and walked into the convent followed by the boy.

"I'll speak to you about this after I have said mass, Sister Monica."

"Said mass indeed, and shure it is not here that you'll ever be allowed to pretend to say mass again ; the reverend-mother told me to tell you so."

"Come and serve, Tom," was all the answer Father John vouchsafed, as he walked to the sacristy to vest.

The good nuns were unprepared for any resistance on his part, they never supposed he would dare to enter their doors again, far less presume to say mass, or they would have locked the chapel door. All they could do now to protest against the sacrilege about to be perpetrated was to absent themselves from chapel ; accordingly, when Father John reached the altar, the chapel was empty. Not in the least disconcerted he said his mass as quietly and reverently as usual ; having finished his thanksgiving he went to the parlour, where he was in the habit of having breakfast. This morning, however, there was no sign of breakfast, and that graceless Father John threw himself into an easy-chair and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks, and when he had recovered from his untimely mirth he had the further effrontery to ring the bell for his breakfast.

It was answered by an elderly lay-sister, who looked very grave and scandalized.

"Good morning, Sister Magdalene ; I should like breakfast as usual, please," said Father John pleasantly.

"Then I must ask you to go somewhere else for it ; there is no breakfast for wicked men who pretend to be priests and are not here," replied Sister Magdalene.

"Who told you I was not a priest ?"

"Sister Monica. Reverend-mother told her ; there is not a nun nor a novice in the convent who does not know you confessed it yourself to reverend-mother yesterday."

"Send mother-abbess to me. Tell her as director of this convent I desire her to come at once, under penalty of deposition from her office should she refuse to obey," said Father John sternly, so sternly that Sister Magdalene fled like a hunted stag to deliver the message verbatim, and then to fall on her knees and thank the Holy Virgin she was not in the abbess's shoes.

Habit forced the abbess to obey the summons without a

moment's hesitation, but never in her life had she been so terrified as when she found herself face to face with father John, who instead of cringing before her like a criminal, confronted her like a judge.

"Abbess. Do you know the penalty due to the traitor, who should dare to reveal one word of what has been told him under the seal of confession?" demanded Father John.

The abbess started back as if he had shot her, but not a word did she answer.

"Do you know the shame, the infamy, the awful treachery of such an act? Do you know the scorn, the degradation, the punishment here and hereafter it would meet with?"

The abbess fell on her knees, trembling with fear, grasping the table with one hand to support her in some measure.

"God have mercy on me; Holy Mary pray for me. I didn't think of that; I didn't know what to do. Oh! God help me, what will become of me? Am I lost? Oh! why was I such a fool as to desire such an awful responsibility?"

"Why, indeed?" said Father John, but this time he spoke in his usual kindly voice, just tempered with a faint touch of amusement.

But the poor abbess fell sobbing on the floor, sobbing as if her heart would break, and Father John stood over her and said:

"Get up, my dear child; get up at once, and listen to me. After all it is not so bad as it seems; you needed a severe lesson and you have had it."

The abbess, accustomed to obey his voice, staggered to her feet, thinking so much of her own folly as to forget Father John's much greater crime.

"Sit down and listen to me! I knew you could not keep the secrecy of the confessional; how should you, poor child, without the special grace which is given to priests to enable them to do so? It is because they are priests and have the grace, not because they are men, that they never betray the trust reposed in them. To convince you of your folly, I told you I was not a priest; had it been true, I need scarcely say you are the very last person in this world to whom I should have confided such a secret."

"Then you are a priest after all? Oh, father, forgive me," and the abbess would have knelt again, but he prevented her.

CHRIS.

"Sit still, my child, or rather, run away and send me some breakfast, and never wish to hear confessions again."

The abbess rose to obey; at the door she turned and said penitently:

"But, father, I have written and told the bishop."

"Never mind; he knew it and was expecting your letter."

The abbess retired covered with confusion, and Father John got his breakfast and apologies from Sister Monica and Sister Magdalene within ten minutes, and the abbess never again wished to hear a confession.

The Mystery of Oldtown Manor.

By MRS. WYNDHAM PAYNE-GALLWEY.

CHAPTER I.

OLDTOWN MANOR was a rambling red-brick structure of sixteenth century date. Time had added to, rather than taken from, the beauty of the house, softening and mellowing its ruddy tints and throwing a veil of lichen, moss and creepers over its weather-beaten face.

The Manor had fortunately remained unrestored during three centuries of ever-varying taste: the mullioned windows were the same from which the Lady Romilly of those days had watched through blinding tears for the return of her gallant sons, who had ridden forth to the Civil Wars and laid down their young lives for the cause of their martyr king.

The trees in the park were all pollarded by Cromwell's orders, in revenge for his failure in discovering Prince Charles when he had lain a week concealed in the "Priest's Hiding Hole" at the Manor.

The gardens were laid out in the formal style beloved of Dutch William and his courtiers; one could imagine the patched and powdered belles of other days coquetting with their attendant swains as they paced the trim alleys leading to the fishponds, or lingered by the sun-dial to read its warning motto: "*Tempus fugit.*"

No wonder that Oldtown appeared a perfect treasury of historical associations to such an inexperienced girl as I was when I paid a visit to my father's cousins, Sir Conrad and Lady Romilly. Thirty years ago girls were not as independent as in these rapid, rushing days, and it was with a feeling of trepidation that I quitted my mother's wing (for the first time in all my nineteen years) and undertook the long journey into the North Riding.

It was such a complete change from our quiet Midlandshire Rectory to a great country house filled with "smart" people, as they would be called nowadays, and I felt pleasantly excited, in spite of my shyness.

I arrived at Oldtown on a warm September afternoon; the peacocks were sunning themselves on the south terrace; there

was a blaze of autumnal blossoms in the gardens, and the woods had scarcely begun to change colour.

I had never seen anything as beautiful as the old house, and my admiration knew no bounds as I entered the great oak hall, lighted by stained glass windows and hung round with family pictures, where the Romillys received me. They were a kindly, middle-aged couple, and though childless themselves, loved nothing more than the society of young people.

Although the day was so bright a log fire burned cheerfully on the open hearth, and there was nothing uncanny in the aspect of the house, nothing to account for a chill feeling which overcame me, a presentiment of sorrow which settled upon me, and I shuddered involuntarily as I followed my cousin to the pretty bedroom prepared for me. Here she left me, with injunctions to rest until dinner time, and as I gazed from my window upon the beauties of wood and lake, my nervousness abated, and when I went down to dinner in the plain white muslin, then considered the most suitable dress for a young girl, I felt quite myself again.

I was introduced to all the guests, and taken into dinner by a certain Captain Trevor. I did not then know that he was a most distinguished officer, and had won the Victoria Cross in the Crimea ; I only knew that he was the most charming person I had ever met, and I forgot all my stupid shyness under the gaze of those tender, dark eyes.

That evening flew by like a dream of happiness, and when I went to bed it was with the conviction that I should thoroughly enjoy my visit to Oldtown.

I was tired out, and slept profoundly for some hours, when I wakened suddenly with such an awful feeling of terror as I had never before experienced. I lighted my candle and listened intently for some moments, but all was quiet in the house ; not a sound to be heard except the regular ticking of the great clock on the stairs.

Unable to sleep again I got up, put on a dressing-gown and sat at the window ; it was the hour between the darkness and dawn, the saddest and most mysterious of the twenty-four.

I was a happy, careless girl, not troubled with nerves or fancies ; but as I gazed out into the eerie silence of the night, it seemed as if some terrible sadness oppressed me, and I, who had never known grief in my bright, short life, felt great tears gathering in my eyes.

Everything was calm and still ; the deer slept beneath the trees ; the moon was just sinking behind the clouds, throwing weird shadows on the water.

Was *that* a shadow, then, that white figure moving beside the lake ?

I looked, wonderingly, prepared for anything, in my excited, overwrought state. As the dim light became stronger, it appeared to me that a woman dressed in flowing white draperies was walking there with faltering steps, sometimes wringing her hands together, as if distracted with sorrow ; then, as I gazed, she vanished from my sight.

I returned to bed, trying not to dwell upon what I had seen, although my practical young mind revolted against any supernatural explanation of it "I must have imagined it," I thought, "unless it were one of the maids walking in her sleep."

When morning came I tried to attribute the vision to a nightmare, and shrank from speaking of it to any one.

The days passed quickly in a round of amusements, and Cuthbert Trevor was always at my side, ready to forestall my slightest wish. I could not bear to think of life without him, and felt what a blank existence would seem when those earnest eyes no longer met mine.

It was a happy time, such as never occurs twice in any life, and my cup was filled to overflowing when I first heard Cuthbert say :

"Stella, I love you !"

I can recall the scene as if it were only yesterday ; we were standing under the shadow of a great weeping ash beside the lake, when he took me in his arms and told me all his love, in words which lie buried in my heart, far too sacred to be repeated here. How I loved him, my hero !

When I knew that the strong, faithful heart was all my own, life seemed as though it could contain no greater happiness.

It was then, at that blissful moment, that an icy shudder passed through me, as on my first night at the Manor, and a strange terror possessed me, which I vainly struggled against.

Then I saw, close to my side, the same shadowy, impalpable form, only now I could distinguish a wan face, with long, fair hair, hanging damp and wet about it, and blue eyes, with such an expression of melancholy as haunted my memory for many a day.

Raising a pale hand, the phantom waved it at us, as if in warning, and then vanished as suddenly as she had appeared.

I was spellbound, but Cuthbert was talking gaily, and so unmoved that I knew he had not seen anything. Was I, then the victim of some strange hallucination?

I could not speak, my lips appeared sealed, as I clung trembling to my lover's arm.

"You are shivering, darling," he exclaimed; "I must not keep you out in the damp any longer. I shall take you to Lady Romilly, and tell her what a treasure I have won," and he led me back to the house.

Our secret soon became known, and congratulations poured upon us. I was made much of by every one, and in the whirl of excitement all melancholy forebodings left my mind. Strange as it may appear, I felt that I could not speak to Cuthbert of what I had seen, although the second appearance of the figure impressed me more than I liked to acknowledge even to myself.

My cousins were delighted, and said that ours was an ideal engagement; indeed Lady Romilly said it was just what she would have wished for a daughter of her own, had she possessed one.

In the sad stillness of my present quiet life, I look at Cuthbert's ring upon my finger and recall that vanished dream. Can this weary, grey-haired woman, I sometimes wonder, be indeed the same as that young girl, crowned with every blessing, and loved by the man who was the very ideal of all her worshipped heroes of romance?

My father came, at the conclusion of my visit, to escort me home, and to make Cuthbert's acquaintance; they were mutually attracted to each other, so there were no obstacles to the course of our true love, which ran smoothly on.

At last the day of our departure came, and although sorry to leave Oldtown, the scene of so much happiness, I rejoiced at seeing my dear mother again and hearing her praises of my betrothed.

The farewells were long and tender; my cousins were loth to let me go, but promised to come to the Rectory in time for our wedding.

As we finally started I turned to wave a last farewell, and instinctively looked up to the window of the room I had

occupied, and there I saw, to my horror, pressed against the pane, the same spectral face, wearing such an expression of mortal anguish as I hope I may never witness again. I looked at my father and lover, but they were engaged in conversation, and remained quite unconscious of my blanched cheeks and startled manner.

CHAPTER II.

CUTHBERT spent some weeks with us, and it was not until he had left and we had settled down into something like our ordinary quiet routine, that I took courage and related my weird experience to my mother.

I expected to hear a laugh or an exclamation of horror at my superstition. But, greatly to my surprise, she looked very grave and said nothing.

"Why, mother, you look as if you had heard it all before, and not one bit astonished," I cried.

"Well, dear, I have long known of the mystery of Oldtown Manor, but so many years have passed since the apparition was last seen that the Romillys hoped, and assured me, that the unquiet spirit was at rest. I believed so, or I should never have allowed you to go there, my child," she said, her voice trembling with emotion.

"Nonsense, mother; you don't really believe it was a *ghost*!" I said, feebly attempting to disbelieve the evidence of my own senses.

"I must," she answered solemnly. "Unfortunately there is no doubt as to the existence of this apparition; if only its consequences may be averted," she added, half to herself.

"What *are* the consequences? Come, now, mother, you have excited my curiosity, and I insist upon knowing all," so, with a great deal of persuasion, I drew from her the following story.

"Towards the close of the last century Oldtown belonged to Sir Everard Romilly, who, having lost his young wife there, took a dislike to the place, and lived in London with his only daughter, who was one of the beauties of Queen Charlotte's court.

The Manor was shut up and left in the charge of an old housekeeper, who had been in the service of the Romillys all her life and was devoted to their interests.

Her orphan grand-daughter, Phyllis Grey, lived with her, a lovely girl of eighteen, very well educated, as education went in those days, and of a modest, retiring disposition.

One day a letter came from Sir Everard, bidding the house-keeper prepare some rooms for the son of his friend Lord Esdaile, who was going to Oldtown, attended by his valet, for a few weeks' shooting and country air.

Mrs. Grey was much excited and pleased at the idea of once more entertaining a guest at the Manor, and received Mr. Esdaile with every possible attention. She herself was too infirm to do much for the visitor, and, as the two servants who comprised her staff were uncouth country girls, she made Phyllis wait upon him, believing, in her simplicity, that any friend of Sir Everard's must be a man of honour.

Unfortunately Harold Esdaile was one of the dissipated companions of the Prince Regent, and, though very handsome and fascinating, was selfish and unprincipled to the last degree.

He was deeply in debt, and obliged to leave town for a time, while his father arranged with his creditors, with a view to his becoming a suitor for the hand of the beautiful Geraldine Romilly.

He saw in Phyllis a distraction for the dull weeks of his enforced absence from his usual haunts, and she, young, inexperienced and innocent, was completely fascinated by the fashionable *roué*, who professed the most passionate love for her.

At last a secret marriage took place; Harold Esdaile signed a fictitious name in the register, believing that by doing so the ceremony would not be a binding one (but he afterwards discovered that this was not the case, and that it would render any subsequent marriage illegal).

When his stay at Oldtown came to an end, he had wearied of his low-born wife, and he hastened to town, where he paid the most assiduous court to Geraldine Romilly, trusting to chance to free him from his country entanglement.

Poor Phyllis drooped and pined as months went by and she heard nothing of her faithless husband. She had no friend in whom to confide her sorrows, and her grandmother, growing daily blinder and more childish and possessed of only one dominant idea (the expected return of Sir Everard to the Manor), paid no attention to her altered looks.

I have seen Phyllis's little diary, blotted with bitter tears, and telling the whole story in pathetic, broken sentences.

At last the time came when she felt that her marriage must no longer be concealed, and she wrote to Harold Esdaile a letter from her very heart, praying him to acknowledge his forsaken wife before it was too late, or at least permit her to tell all to her grandmother.

This touching appeal brought forth only the briefest and coldest of replies from her husband, bidding her meet him on a certain evening, under the ash tree by the lake, when he would see what could be done.

That day the housekeeper heard from her master of his daughter's engagement to Mr. Esdaile, and that they would immediately return to the Manor, where the marriage was to take place without delay.

As her old grandmother slowly spelt out the letter containing this crushing intelligence, Phyllis listened in horrified silence, almost doubting the evidence of her own senses.

Then she rose and glided from the room, to keep her appointment with her husband, and from that interview she never returned.

Detectives were then unknown, and although a hue and cry was next day raised, no traces of the missing girl could be found.

The great event of Sir Everard's return took place within a few days of Phyllis' disappearance, and the fate of an insignificant country girl seemed of slight importance to any one but her grandmother, in the excitement that followed.

The Manor was filled with guests, and preparations for the wedding were pushed on with all possible speed.

The wedding day dawned dark and cheerless; the bride looked pale and melancholy in the morning, and in answer to her father's anxious inquiries she said that her sleep had been troubled by a terrible dream.

Her bridesmaids pressed her to relate it, and at length she said reluctantly:

"I dreamed that I was standing at the altar with Harold, but dressed in the deepest mourning; the church was hung with black, and the guests looked like the dead.

"The ceremony went on until Harold was about to place the ring upon my finger, and then a cold hand came between us and

snatched it away. It all seemed so real, and I awoke feeling as if that icy hand were clutching at my heart," and she shuddered as she spoke.

It was a superstitious age, and the hearers were more affected by the narrative than they liked to show, but they laughed it off and led her away to dress her for her bridal.

The old villagers used to say that a lovelier bride than Geraldine Romilly was never seen, but the bridegroom was as white as the powder in his hair; his hands shook, and he glanced nervously about him as he stood at the altar. The onlookers remarked that he had none of the triumphant air to be expected of a man who was marrying, not only the most celebrated beauty of her day, but also the greatest heiress in all England.

The bells rang out with a joyous peal as Harold Esdaile led his bride to the carriage, and his face looked less clouded; but as they reached the gate the wedding procession was suddenly confronted by another.

Four labourers were hastening through the park, carrying a ghastly burden on a rudely contrived hurdle; it was the body of Phyllis Grey.

Her long fair hair trailed upon the ground with water dripping from it, the blue eyes stared stonily into vacancy, one hand hung limply down.

"It is the cold hand of that dreadful dream," exclaimed the bride, as she shrank back, looking to her husband for sympathy in her terror, but he was glaring at the body, with the wild, despairing gaze of one whose sin had indeed found him out.

"Turn your eyes away, Phyllis," he yelled; "turn them away, and I will confess all. Yes, you were indeed my wife, and I *murdered* you;" and breaking from those who would have restrained him he rushed madly away, leaving the spectators transfixed with horror.

Geraldine sank fainting upon the ground, and a scene of the greatest confusion ensued.

That was an awful night at Oldtown Manor; the wind howled round the house, the thunder pealed, and vivid flashes of lightning lit up the room where the pale corpse lay; the same room where she had dreamed her girlish dreams of love, all unconscious of the terrible fate awaiting her.

In her desk they found ample proof of the truth of Esdaile's.

self-accusing words, and the wedding ring that she had never dared to wear in life was reverently placed on her cold finger ere they bore her to the old churchyard.

The next morning some shepherds, returning from the moor, brought word that in a snow drift, cold and dead, they had found the body of Harold Esdaile.

Nemesis had overtaken him as he fled madly from the consequences of his crime, and he had perished miserably, with only the night winds to sing his requiem.

Geraldine never recovered from the shock, and died within a few weeks of her fatal wedding day; her heartbroken father did not long survive her.

The Manor passed to a distant cousin, who did his best to hush up the whole tragic story; but poor Phyllis's spirit seems unable to rest, and has always appeared once to a generation, to some maiden of Romilly race; "and they say," here my mother's voice faltered, "that it portends a disastrous ending to that girl's love story. It has always been so hitherto. Oh, that I had never allowed you to go to Oldtown, my Stella; it was very, very wrong of me."

Her emotion impressed me, in spite of myself, though I tried to make a jest of it, and threatened to tell Cuthbert that she had been frightening me with ghost stories.

Our wedding was to be early in the New Year, and I was much occupied with my preparations, and had but few moments for anxious thought. Still there *were* times when the spectre's warnings would recur to my mind, filling me with sudden fear; but I was always reassured by Cuthbert's daily letter, telling me of his well-being and unaltered love.

The settlements and other business detained Cuthbert in London until Christmas Eve.

It was a bright, frosty day, and I drove to the station to meet him,—but there had been an accident to his train, and so I never saw my darling again, and have lived through all these weary years, a sad and silent woman, whose joys are all in the past.

I never visited the Manor again, but believe that since it passed into a stranger's possession its spectre has not appeared to any one.

The Great Dream Mine.

A YARN OF WESTRALIA IN 1895.

By HUME NISBET,

Author of "BAIL UP," "THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

MY CHUMS.

THERE were three of us on that prospecting job, Coolgardie Joseph, Forky Ben, and myself, whose name needn't be mentioned.

Forky Ben was a singular customer, of about fifty years of age, not bad as a mate, for he could cook well, and did not shirk his work, and was besides an entertaining companion, having seen a great deal of the shady side of the colonies, "done" various terms for misdeeds in the past, and yet was about as honest as one can expect to find on the gold fields now-a-days.

He had started his colonial experiences as a convict, and having served his time, had likewise served his adopted country as a policeman, and won considerable reputation in the force. His bane had been his wife, who represented his evil genius in all his undertakings, until she left him, ruined, yet with a chance of doing for himself. We fell across Forky Ben when on the "Wallaby track," *i.e.*, the tramp, and as he showed up gamely then, we had stuck together ever since, through good and bad luck.

Not much good luck hitherto, I must say, for although Westralia has gold enough, it is the rich man's country, and you know what that means; the men who can afford to fix up machinery will make the coin all right, but as for nuggets and alluvial mining, our show was not up to much, and we couldn't afford to play about the quartz.

I can tell you, though, I have seen that same quartz with the ore thick enough through it to make one's mouth water, and wish that quartz-crushing machines didn't cost such a pile of money. I could lay my finger on spots of the map of Westralia where fortunes lie pocketed; there's been a boom on it, I have heard, in London since I left, but I can tell you the boom isn't big enough. Westralia won't disappoint its backers, so far as the ore is concerned at least.

For all that, it isn't quite the place to bring a young, blushing and delicately-nurtured bride to, *yet*, who may not have grown up to live on tinned sardines, condensed water, and such like luxuries exclusively. No, the bride mightn't like it much; besides, if she was a cleanly inclined girl she would be apt to pine after a bit of soap, which would ruin her husband, as water is too expensive to waste that way.

Yes, I'll tell the truth about the land as I know it. The water is about as expensive as the whisky, sometimes more so. The tinned meat isn't always to be depended upon, and there are a hundred other inconveniences to be endured that I needn't mention at present, only the gold is there all right, also other natural means of wealth yet to be utilized.

My mate, Forky Ben, was an old colonial; he had seen three generations growing up, and, as he said, each one seemed to be going back; "in fact, if the colonial goes on growing much more legs and don't develop a little body, the country will be to let in another twenty years."

Forky was great on this point as to the decadence of the colonials. "I've watched 'em," he would say, striking his pannikin on the log. "I've watched them a-growing up and gradually losing all principle and humanity. The first lot as comes out for their country's good may be a bit vicious at times, but they have hearts in them and stick to a friend; the second breed ain't so dusty; still they don't care much for their friends, nor do they think a man's word is worth considering; but the good Lord help us from the third generation: they'll sit on a fence all the blessed day planning out a mean robbery on a benefactor; they don't know what truth means, and as for faith or trust, they are sounds to laugh at with the young breed Australian. He knows how to bet on a horse or a cricket or a football match. Oh, yes! The youngest baby is up to that as soon as he can toddle; but as for work, or sticking to a pal, they couldn't see it and don't know what it means. They don't believe in a God; they have no country to believe in, and no traditions to uphold. They only credit the one who can get the better of them. All legs, conceit and bounce, without belly or brains, they are like the stag hounds, inveterate and sneaking biters."

Forky Ben was a philosopher in his crude way, and he knew the people he talked about particularly well. He was a Sydney

side colonial in the adopted sense, yet he did admit that the Victorians had not gone back quite so rapidly as the New South Welshers. "They are rotten," he would shout wildly sometimes. "What they want now is to be conquered and wiped out."

I was merely a trifler in the gold-finding business. I had left London for a time for my health's sake, and was merely waiting on a disputed legacy. The House of Lords would in good time settle my affairs, meanwhile I thought I'd look round me a little and gain experience; therefore, as Westralia was on the table when I left, I thought I might as well take that portion of the globe. Africa tempted me for a time, but I finally decided to take it afterwards.

I picked up my chum on the road. I was riding along when I fell first upon Coolgardie Joseph, as we always called him. The country was arid. I was hot and thirsty, and my knacker ditto, when, as I passed a portion of the gully, I heard a human voice, husky and doleful as despair and pain could make the voice human. It was a moan—a groan and a curse combined; the sound men utter when God seems to forsake them and they repudiate the apparent Forsaker.

I went over to where he lay and lifted him up to my saddle beside me, and then, when I had carried him to where I could give him some succour, he told me his yarn, which somehow endeared him to me.

He had left England in a fit of spleen, had grown sick of his club friends, likewise those who tried to get nearer to him; to use his own words:

"I loved a woman, but she didn't seem to care much for me, so I left. When love gets hold of a man it seems to blot out all the rest of life's interests. I didn't care much for anything else after that woman, she seemed to comprise my all. My friends—yes, I liked them, but I didn't want to see them just then. I wanted to be by myself, with my special wounds to doctor, therefore I came away from England. The boys knew my woman and knew me, therefore that was enough. They knew that I didn't want to say good-bye to them, and so they let me go quietly.

"I had a mighty craving on me just at that time. I had relations in Australia, in Sydney—a brother and two sisters, to whom, as a boy, I had felt tender; therefore I thought, like the

prodigal of old, I'll go to my father's house, and peradventure they will receive me.

"I was no prodigal in the sense of the husks, for I had done work enough to make people who owned me, as I fondly thought, proud enough of me. Well! at Albany I got a letter from this brother repudiating me utterly—he thought I was coming out to ask help from him, and he told me, in language forcible and terse, to go to the devil.

"I went to Sydney and interviewed him and the rest of the domestic crew. He repeated in language what he had written, and with an effort I plucked him out of my heart. My other relations were kind after a style, yet I had not represented the family dignity, so they also gave me the cold shoulder, as did their middle-class relations. They were rich so far, and they politely ignored me; in fact I was a pariah amongst these wretched provincials.

"I studied the vile crew. I had grown accustomed to aristocrats as my friends, and as I saw the paltry tricks of these wretched menials I gave the game up and said to myself—let me out to the wilds once more, where I can see men and women as God made them and meant them to be. I cut all that by blood belonged to me straight out of my heart, and mounting my horse, rode off free, and so far happy."

This was the tale of Coolgardie Joseph, my second mate. He was personally to me a more interesting character than Forky Ben, because he felt a strain of poetry, and had experienced a touch of heart bitterness, which, as I have felt it, always appeals to me.

In this fashion we got together, the three of us, Forky Ben, Coolgardie Joseph and myself. We never quarrelled, and we always worked for the common end, the making of money enough to get home and enjoy ourselves—for after all, England is the place for Englishmen.

CHAPTER II.

A BRACE OF VISIONS AND THE RESULT.

THE story of Coolgardie Joseph, however, was not much more edifying than that of Forky Ben, and considerably less amusing, for while some humour may be extracted out of the wily ways of a tricky spouse, with the hundred and one dodges that a man has

to take to in order to live in the side-paths of colonial commerce, the quarrelling between uncongenial and unfeeling relatives is too commonplace and sordid to get anything like a grin out of.

I did not, of course, endorse this wholesale condemnation of Forky Ben respecting the third generation of New South Welshers. There must be good, bad and indifferent specimens in this section of humanity, as there are in other communities. What I had studied of their politicians didn't greatly impress me as to their probity. The shopkeepers' notions of fair dealing might, to put it mildly, be just a little vague, and there were certainly an overwhelming proportion of "*bounders*" and "*larikins*" amongst them yet. For all that, the parent colony of New South Wales had its points, and many a warm dispute we had about these, Forky Ben and Coolgardie Joseph siding against me, while I stuck up for the condemned section as well as a new cham could do.

Forky Ben had a face, old and seamy as a piece of crackling ware, with crooked eyes and a neck like an English terrier. His figure also was thin and spare, but wiry.

Coolgardie Joseph was a tall, good-looking fellow of about thirty-three, without much flesh on his bones, and mostly serious in his demeanour. Possibly this habit of regarding things too earnestly was the cause of his taking so much to heart the paltry meanness of his own kindred.

Where I had found him on the point of giving up the game was as lonely a gully as one could well imagine, desolate and bare, with an odd patch here and there of dried up scrub, and nothing but stretches of hot dust and sand on either side of it.

He had been on the tramp with two other colonials whose acquaintance he had made on board the steamer coming round, and they were all pushing on to get to the gold-fields, forty-six miles from where he caved in. His feet had given way, and after one or two rough remonstrances, his mates had left him to die and be done with it, which was the only course they could have taken unless they desired to share his doom likewise. There are no almshouses or pauper establishments in the colonies, so that, when men and women get played out there, they are at liberty to hang or drown themselves, get into jail or the infirmary, and die as soon as possible, no one else cares how

soon, for each is fighting for his own hand. The soil of Australia is more productive of cynics than philanthropists, and humanity is not quite so highly valued as sheep and cattle.

He had dropped to earth, and there they left him, without more than a backward glance to see if he was not following. Two days afterwards they reached the gold field and got a job at four pounds a week each. Joseph also might have got a job on the same terms, only that we decided to do a bit of prospecting on our own account, for Forky Ben was an experienced miner, and when he spoke hopefully we believed in his prophecies.

We prowled about here and there, as far away from the general camp as we could get, and with varying luck; sometimes we picked up enough to keep us in grub, sometimes we worked to a dead loss, and at odd times we made enough in one or two hours to keep us going for a fortnight or three weeks.

We were working on the dry system, which isn't the best, yet Forky Ben had a keen touch and sight, and seldom allowed many specks to slip through his hand. During the day the heat was intense, while the nights were cold and bone-piercing. The water also, which we had to purchase, was bad, and as I have said, the provisions were worse even than the water, so that there was only hard work and little comfort to be got out of the life we were leading, and I, for one, had almost made up my mind to give it best and return to civilization.

One night we were lying in front of our tent trying to extract what comfort we could glean out of our pipes, after a supper of damper and tinned salmon, which was not conspicuous for its freshness. None of us had washed for a week past, and then it was only the end of a damp towel passed over the eyes to clear the sand out which we dignified by the title of a wash.

Coolgardie Joseph, who was always of a sentimental turn, had been telling us about that young lady of his, in the old country, whom he yet-hoped to marry, if *ever he was rich enough* and some other fellow didn't get before him, and then his yarn over, he turned round with a yawn and fell asleep.

Forky Ben lay on his back and dilated on the delights a small and sunny country inn would be to a man at his turn of life and with his vast experiences. He was content to talk, and did not ask too much attention from his hearers, so that I lay half dozing and looking at the moon, which was just appearing over the

distant ranges, when all at once my mind became concentrated on the gully where first I saw Coolgardie Joseph.

The actual scenery seemed to vanish from my eyes, and instead of the half moon a bright glare of daylight pervaded the scene. I saw the spot where Joseph had lain when I rode up, but where his body had covered was now a hole, and in it a man, digging and throwing up the earth.

He had not got far down, but he was working with a purpose, and as I strode over to the edge and looked in, I recognized Coolgardie Joseph himself, pegging away. I picked up a handful of the earth that he was shovelling out, and as I filtered it through my fingers the sunrays glistened on the yellow specks—it was thick with gold dust.

A moment afterwards the fancy picture vanished, leaving me lying in front of the tent, with Forky Ben still gabbling about that old English inn where he meant to end his days, and Coolgardie Joseph grunting in his sleep like a pig after an extra feed.

A moment afterwards, and while I was still rubbing my eyes, he started up with an exclamation:

"By Jove! but I have had a dream, to be sure."

"What was it?" I asked curiously.

"You remember that gully where you found me?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Could you find the spot where I was lying?"

"Easily—why?"

"I dreamt just now that I was back there, and digging a hole from which half the dirt I flung out was gold dust."

"Ah!" said Forky Ben, "dreams always are to be read contrary fashion, so that dream of yours means nothing."

"Well, Ben, just at the time Joseph was having his dream, I also saw him on the same spot digging away, and I '*specimened*' the earth to find it as he has described, crowded."

"Did *you* dream that, mate?" asked both Coolgardie Joseph and Forky Ben with eager interest, sitting up and looking at me open-mouthed.

"Well, boys, I don't know whether to call it a dream or a waking vision, but I saw it and handled the dirt."

"Then, by the Lord Harry, dream or vision, that's the spot for us to fossock. Two men can't dream a lie at the same time. It's a revelation, that's what I call it," cried out Forky Ben excitedly.

We did not sleep much that night, you may depend, and when morning came we were off to the camp for a month's supply of stores, and then packing up we went on the backward track without mentioning the matter to any one.

The gully was easy to find, and it did not take me long to peg out the place where I had found Joseph cursing the Providence that had brought him to his fortune ; for the first two hours of digging showed us that our dreams had not been delusions : there each bucket came up filled with earth, thickly impregnated with gold.

Curious how nasty, bad tinned salmon and condensed water taste when luck is hanging back, and how little we are apt to consider such trifles when good fortune is with us. The camp lay forty-six miles from us, and our single horse had little enough to eat in that desert ; every drop of water had to be carried from the camp, so that although we were most economical over it, still the water bags had to be replenished every third or fourth day, which meant a waste of time that we grudged, so eager were we to pile up the dust before the rush came.

And we got it too, in minute specks at first, yet plentiful ; then as we went deeper into the earth the nuggets kept growing bigger, pennyweights, then half and whole ounces, with occasional lumps which were worth the lifting.

We knew the big nuggets were all right, but we were better pleased with the tiny specks and dust, for those meant a long bit of business. After we had satisfied ourselves with the one hole, we struck out in other directions, to find that we had discovered a field. There were quartz ridges round us on every side, and doubtless they also were seamed, as the soil was sprinkled with the precious ore.

In two months we had made three thousand pounds apiece, which would be enough to carry us to England and float our company, therefore, like wise men, we sat down to consider our future plans. We must purchase the ground first and then seal it up without raising suspicions, not an easy matter amongst gold-seekers.

I was deputed to work the oracle while with winchesters and colts my mates mounted guard over our future property, and I fancy for a new chum I managed fairly well to pull the blinkers over the government men, so that cautiously I purchased the

entire gully, after which we pitched aside all disguise and exhibited the field.

Gracious heaven ! what a magic power gold has to transform a man in the eyes of his friends. Coolgardie Joseph, who had been metaphorically vomited out of Sydney, returned to it before he sailed to England, a king. The narrow-minded provincials wallowed before him and literally worshipped him, without winning a spark of respect or regard from him in return. It is difficult to blind even a millionaire by flattery, who has had the reverse side of the picture presented to him in the days of his supposed adversity. In England he found his young lady still waiting for him ; certain malicious persons told him that she had almost got married to the wrong man during his absence, only that the wrong man had gone away without committing himself ; but that is the way of the malicious world, and Joseph had the good taste not to believe them, so that he married his own true love, and I think they are bound to be happy, for they are very wealthy, and wealthy people are always happy, are they not ?

His relations write every mail gushing letters to him and his bonnie bride, but Coolgardie Joseph does not answer these affectionate epistles.

Forky Ben has reached the height of his ambition, a cosy inn situated in one of the most charming parts of dear old England ; yet he is not happy because, singular to relate, after a twenty years' absence his dear wife turned up to manage the bar for him. They met, as spectres are supposed to meet, on the shores of the Styx, both having been dead to each other for so many years. Forky Ben looked aghast, panted for a few moments, and surrendered. Mrs. Forky likewise started back at the sight of her dear and lamented one, but she had come upon him prepared, for a rich man cannot hide his light nor his name under a bushel. After her first start of feigned surprise she asserted her rights, and Forky collapsed. She now manages the country inn, and her respected husband makes the best of the situation.

I have nothing personally to grumble at either, for we are garnering in the golden grains, and our field has a considerable boom in the city. It is now in the market, with the shares steadily rising and eagerly sought after. I also am in the same position as our Great Dream Mine.

Under the Portico.

IT was a classic portico to all intents and purposes, giving entrance to a Palace of Art—modern, nineteenth century, christianized art ; but art as robust and inspired as when Olympus, with its august diadem of gods, reared in sovereignty its haughty head in Attica. This reflection was a great comfort to me as I sat, I cannot say rested, on one of the very unclassically-shaped benches which were anything but ornamental to the portico, awaiting the coming of a friend ; and but for the leaden sky and the keenly whistling wind of the merry month of May, which swept through the classic columns, I might, with such an environment, have whiled away the heavy-footed hours by indulging in a dream of the cradle of art—"of Greece, though living Greece no more."

As a matter of fact, I beguiled my enforced leisure by staring at the devotees, gentle and simple, who thronged to make their offerings at the shrine within.

It was only a glimpse I was privileged to obtain of the fashionable crowd, who, disdaining to perform their pilgrimage on foot, were conveyed thither with all the pomp and circumstance that the perfection of equipages could compass. Nevertheless, as carriage after carriage thundered impressively over the pavement to set down its freight of beauty and ugliness, genius and stupidity, there was ample opportunity to recognize in the representatives of the great world of to-day, the identical characteristics which distinguished the dominant class when the world was young in Athens.

This crowd, so inquisitive, so cultured, so acute, so agog after novelty, did but reflect the civilization of the old world, albeit modified and mellowed by the moral element—the outcome of Christianity.

Also were obnoxious to recognition in the personality of familiar friends and acquaintances as under the porticoes of ancient Greece, the Sophist, the Epicurean, the Stoic, the Priest, and lastly, the Slave ; not, however, the abjectly cowering slave of the old *régime*, but the pampered menials of a pampered race. Cowering ? Oh, dear, no ! but deporting themselves with

assurance ; keenly watchful, to do them justice, of their masters' pleasure, grouping themselves in nonchalant ease about the pillars of the portico.

I was rather struck by the humour of the scene, and took a note of it as a suggestion for my next *genre* picture. There were no flowing draperies, to be sure, no fascinating folds for the brush to linger over and coquet with, but only the severe lines of the outdoor integuments in which it pleaseth the great world of up-to-date Britain to ensheath its liveried dependants. There was no lack of variety in the make-up of the puppet-like figures under the portico, from the interminable overcoat profusely emblazoned with buttons of the slaves of the august chariot, to the short frock of the dapper "tiger" attendant on the smart victoria.

One individual of the species especially interested me, by reason of his total disregard of the convenience of all and sundry to whom he owed not allegiance. While his brother thralls considerably hung about the columns of the portico, thus leaving a clear space for the passers-by, my gentleman planted himself directly in the gangway, ay, and maintained his position there in spite of all comers. It was nothing to him if ladies were compelled to step aside in order to avoid direct personal contact with him, or that gentlemen ostentatiously made parabolas of themselves in a vain attempt to convey to him, as delicately as possible, that even the general public have rights.

This polite forbearance had no effect whatever upon the stolid obstructionist, who, encased in real as well as metaphorical brass, stood firm as a rock and as impenetrable, presenting a Napoleonic profile always at the same angle, and with his gaze turned almost without winking towards the grand staircase within the vestibule, by which I supposed he expected his feudal lord to descend and order him out to instant execution, should he fail to catch the first sign of his master's approach. I could but admire his steadfastness and loyalty to one idea, though slightly bored by his want of variety.

Being unpleasantly recalled to a sense of my object in being under that portico by a convulsion in the nature of a small earthquake, but which owed its origin to the uprising of some other occupants of the bench, which, being decrepit as well as ill-favoured, sank about a foot at my end when the weight which had balanced it at the other was removed, I cast about, after

recovering from the shock to my system, for some signs of my friend's approach.

My gaze met the face, not of the person expected, but of one that had been familiar and ever-welcome in past days ; so changed that I could hardly command my voice to utter the words of greeting. When I did so I was met by a blank look that had no recognition in it. This puzzled me, as I was aware that I had altered scarcely at all, except by the bronzing of African suns during the two years that had elapsed since I had last looked on that face in Italy.

Seeming to recover herself with an effort, however, the girl's large dark eyes, that I remembered so soft and kindly, were turned on me with a hard, calculating stare, and she reluctantly gave me a hand cold as ice. As I looked into the bloodless face, which was wont to be so softly blooming, and at the almost ashy lips, my emotion broke out in the inquiry :

"Forgive me, my dear Miss Brangwyn, but what can have happened to cause you to appear so ill and so altogether unlike yourself ?"

She answered with a harsh laugh :

"I will be as frank as yourself, and reply to your catechism without circumlocution. I have been jilted, and have had an illness which has left my memory so impaired that I confess to being unable to recall your name, though I can recollect your face."

I was as much shocked by the recklessness of this statement as by the implication of *brusquerie* on my part. Indeed the defiant callousness of the girl's manner was so foreign to the sweet graciousness of the Maude Brangwyn I had known that I was driven to the conclusion that her troubles had unsettled the intellect of my quondam friend. I ventured to offer some expressions of sympathy.

They were received coldly enough, but I persevered at the risk of seeming to be intrusive, for I honestly wished to ascertain if I could be of use to Miss Brangwyn, and ventured the inquiry as to whether her marvellous gift of clairvoyance had suffered from the shock caused by her illness and trouble.

"Ah," returned she, with again the grating laugh which had so jarred upon my nerves, "you are upon that tack, are you, Mr.—Mr.—I cannot recall your name."

"Pardon me," I replied, "for not having intruded it upon your

memory before. Surely my name—Frank Broughton—must have some associations for you."

"Oh, certainly," returned the young lady sarcastically, "you were one of my most credulous dupes. I hope it will not shock you to hear that my claim to clairvoyance had no foundation whatever, in fact; that I was, in truth, a sham."

Being less disgusted at this shameless admission than penetrated with the conviction that Miss Brangwyn was, vulgarly speaking, trying to throw dust into my eyes, though to what end I could not guess, I rejoined:

"You must not forget that you gave all your 'dupes' incontestable proof that you had the power to pass to the 'astral plane.' Your present disclaimer must originate in another aberration of memory."

Miss Brangwyn erected her head as a snake does before it strikes; indeed her whole expression was so full of venom that I had reason to congratulate myself that our meeting was taking place under the ægis of the public, for my fair interlocutor looked quite capable of taking the law into her own hands as she hissed out:

"Do you doubt my word? Do you think I am lying to you?"

Humbly deprecating her anger, I endeavoured to make my peace by offering to escort her through the exhibition of pictures as soon as my friend, for whom I was waiting, should arrive.

"Thanks, very much," returned Miss Brangwyn. "I also await, I will not say a friend, but one who, being an artist, has business here. I have obtained a day's holiday for the purpose of meeting him."

She spoke bitterly, and I then called to mind what I had totally forgotten, that Brangwyn *père*, the great City merchant and banker, since those palmy days at Rome where he had played the part of a grand seigneur surrounded by a brilliant society, had become bankrupt; that his daughter's splendid match had been broken off in consequence, and that, more shame for us, his competitors, he and his daughter had been allowed to "go under," and to be lost to the world they could no longer benefit, without a protest. I reflected on my share in the general neglect with compunction, and it was with diffidence that I ventured to ask for some particulars of her life since we had met in Italy.

"I have lived," she informed me, "the life of a dog since ill-fortune came upon us. After my father's death, I took service

as companion in a rich family of—*spiritualists*. The spirituality consists in isolating themselves almost entirely from their fellow-creatures in the mass, avoiding all places of worship, concerts or gatherings of any kind, lest they should contract or become saturated with 'bad fluid,' as they spiritualistically designate the atmosphere of all crowds, without meaning to convey the idea of carbonic-acid gas—I see the scientific words trembling on your lips." I muttered a disclaimer to the effect that I knew what "bad fluid" in the spiritualistic sense meant, and Miss Brangwyn proceeded:

"Thus, the head of the family—a handsome, able-bodied man of about forty—fritters away his life in managing a houseful of servants in the morning as an occupation—his wife being a black-eyed, treacly-haired Italian woman with no capacity for anything beyond the *dolce far niente* existence to which she was born—and in daubing bad pictures as a pursuit in the afternoon; the evening being devoted to dining and lounging. And the family being of the strictest sect vegetarians, daily is the conviction forced upon me that better is a stalled ox where love is, than a 'vegetarian' dinner of herbs, and hatred therewith; our herbs being invariably served with a sauce of invective against the cook for her want of variety and invention, and of freely-expressed disgust and discontent at and with the dishes, induced, I strongly suspect, by an irrepressible hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt."

Miss Brangwyn paused abruptly with again the snake-like erection of the head and the venomous look in the eyes. Following their glance I saw it was directed upon a handsome couple—a lady and gentleman who were at that moment leaving the building by the steps into the portico.

"It is he," breathed my companion in a sort of strangled whisper dreadful to listen to, and she passed like a flash to the head of the stone steps down which the couple were about to descend to their carriage.

I noticed, without being aware that I noticed, so enthralled was I by the dramatic interest of the situation, that the equipage was of the best style and fashion, and that the high-mettled horses were with difficulty held in check.

The lady swept past Miss Brangwyn with a gesture of disdain at her intrusion; the gentleman visibly recoiled from her contact, and hastily followed with a blanched face his wife into the carriage. The servants and commissionaires were evidently unaware

of anything unusual, probably taking for granted that the lady on foot chose to leave the portico by that particular outlet. From this last circumstance I infer that no word was spoken, but before the door of the barouche could be closed, the sharp report of a pistol rang out, and simultaneously a piercing scream from one woman as her husband fell, shot to the heart at her side, and the demoniac yell of the other, as, with the words, "I am avenged on you both, false lover, false friend!" she dashed herself from the curbstone into the roadway beneath the trampling hoofs of the terrified horses. She was dragged thence, a shocking spectacle, mangled and bleeding and, to all appearance, dead.

A gentleman at that moment leaving the building, who proved to be a medical man, came to the assistance of the wounded occupant of the carriage. Life was found, however, to be quite extinct, and the carriage, with its sad burden covered with a gorgeous rug, and accompanied by the half-distracted wife, who absolutely refused to be separated from her husband's body, and attended by the indispensable policeman, rolled slowly out of the quadrangle—into which but a short time before it had swept so debonairly—on its way home to Park Lane; one of the servants having been sent on to prepare the household of Mr. Colvin, for it was known at once that the dead man was the rising artist of that name.

The wretched perpetrator of all this mischief, laid on the rickety bench she had lately occupied with her wicked intent harboured and encouraged in her mind, was found by the doctor to be still breathing. An ambulance was procured and she was conveyed by the police to the nearest hospital.

Inexpressibly shocked I again sought rest on the unaccommodating bench, which began to have quite a horrible fascination for me. I would gladly have left the portico, but my friend, who was starting on a prolonged tour on the next day, must still be waited for. I appeared to myself to have already waited hours, though in point of fact it was barely thirty minutes since I had sat down untroubled and serene, to be violently shaken in more senses than one.

It seemed incredible that in a short half-hour so tremendous an upheaval of the smiling surface of things should have taken place. And this was the more difficult to realize, because the outward aspect of things was changed hardly at all. But for

some rapidly drying patches on the pavement where certain ominous stains had been washed out, and the whitened countenances of the liveried servants still in attendance under the portico, with the stream of unconscious pleasure-seekers still going and coming, I could have believed myself in a dream, and the recently enacted tragedy mere phantasmagoria.

It was very real, however, and I was aroused from my waking dream prosaically enough. An inspector of police politely requested my name and address, in case I might be called as a witness to what had taken place under the portico.

I complied, and while searching for my card-case, a carriage was driven furiously through the great gates into the quadrangle, and a gentleman of about "forty, able-bodied and handsome"—my old friend Howth to a T—with a lady over whose every feature and movement the languorous *dolce far niente* of the South lay like a veil, alighted at the portico, accompanied, to my great surprise, by my friend Hesseltine, whom I was expecting to meet.

Looking anxiously and hurriedly round, the party were about to enter the building, when Hesseltine caught sight of me. I rose, and was greeted with his usual effusiveness.

"How fortunate, my dear fellow, to have met you" (as if we had not made an appointment for that very purpose). "I have been lunching with my good friends, whom of course you remember, the Howths, of Wimbledon, and they are in the greatest perplexity. Have you been here long? and have you by any chance observed a girl, 'a young lady of medium height,' reading from a slip of paper in his hand, "dark hair and eyes, pale complexion, dressed in a grey chequered dust-cloak, and small grey straw hat, trimmed with violets?"

I knew that Miss Brangwyn's eyes were deeply, darkly blue, and that her once blush-rose complexion was now pale to ghastliness. I had not noticed her attire in detail, but had been aware of a grey tone in it, and had perceived the odour of violets, some real flowers having probably been interpolated (such is the thoroughness of fashion, I am told) to give verisimilitude to the merely artificial blossoms.

The lady, Mrs. Howth, was the first to read the answer in my face; and quickly perceiving my hesitation, appealed to me in her pretty broken English not to keep them in suspense. "For,"

said she, "we dearly love our poor Mees Brangwyn, and must, oh must, find her."

Howth and I had cordially greeted each other as soon as we could get a word in edgewise; and now, how could I my hideous tale unfold? I temporised by asking for particulars of Miss Brangwyn's disappearance. Howth undertook to enlighten me.

Miss Brangwyn had, he said, lived with them as friend and companion to Mrs. Howth for nearly two years. That they had been much drawn together by the sympathy which existed between them in spiritualistic matters—Miss Brangwyn being a "medium" of the very first order and subject to the mesmeric trance on very slight provocation, even by the reflection of her own fixed gaze in a mirror—that on the morning of that day she had been found in such a trance, and had been unavoidably left in charge of a servant, during whose temporary absence Miss Brangwyn must have recovered consciousness. She had, at all events, left the house without encountering any one but a gardener, who reported that the young lady was looking "strange-like," and had told him that she was "going to see the pictures."

"Now," continued my friend, "as Miss Brangwyn had visited the exhibition with us only the day before, my wife and I considered this strange, to say the least, and as she had not returned after some hours, we became seriously uneasy, and guided only by this slight clue, are now searching for her."

"And had you then taken any means to put Miss Brangwyn into the trance?" I inquired.

"Most certainly not," replied Howth. "I never attempted to do so unless in the presence of others, and she was always carefully watched excepting in this one unfortunate instance."

"Then how," persisted I, "do you account for her having passed into the trance without the intervention of a mesmerist?"

"That is a very difficult question," replied Howth, "and might be answered in several ways quite satisfactory to a spiritualist."

"I am not a spiritualist," I retorted, "but have, I trust, some little common sense, which I should be glad, in Miss Brangwyn's interests, to exercise upon your reply to my last inquiry, should you consider it worth while to reply to a merely uninitiated person."

"I fear that my explanation cannot be tested by merely common sense, because the data on which to form a judgment are not common. You must bring insight and faith—I don't

mean credulity—to bear, or your merely common sense will reject a perhaps important clue.”

“I will still,” I perversely replied, “use common sense, which I take to be a general sense—appreciative of all aspects of things—as my divining rod.”

“My dear fellow,” here put in Hesseltine impatiently, “while you are encouraging Howth in riding his favourite hobby, we are wasting precious time. Meanwhile, as the exhibition is closing, Mrs. Howth and I have been exercising *our* common sense in watching the departing visitors. There go the last ; but we have not seen Miss Brangwyn.”

“Nor ever will,” I exclaimed incautiously. Then observing my embarrassment at having made an admission, Howth, taking out his watch and remarking that there were still a few minutes to elapse before closing time, proposed that he and I should look through the rooms on the chance of finding a possible lingerer in the person of Miss Brangwyn.

“You, Hesseltine,” he concluded, “can look after my wife meanwhile. You can rest either in the carriage or on this friendly bench.”

They selected the bench, and it was with a shudder I saw them take possession of it with the usual alarming results ; as well as with some misgivings as to the probability of a casual revelation of the dreadful associations recently connected with it. But there seemed no alternative but to comply with my friend’s suggestion.

We entered the vestibule, but at the foot of the great staircase we involuntarily came to a stop and confronted each other.

“You have something to tell,” said my companion. “It is no use going further. We can intercept that poor girl if she appears.”

I acquiesced, and forthwith unburdened my mind of the fearful story of the past hour. The effect on my listener was overwhelming.

“Then,” said he solemnly, “we shall never see that poor girl again. We may find her person, but the beautiful soul will have gone, ousted by some demon hovering and waiting for the chance of entering in and clothing itself in her mortal form, which, I greatly fear, from what you tell me, has been dragged down to destruction ; though even that were preferable to harbouring a lost spirit inimical to all with whom it comes in contact.”

With the intention of opposing a little of my vaunted common sense to my friend's somewhat hastily deduced conclusions (as I thought them), I ventured to remind him that he had the very slightest grounds on which to build so startling a theory; that he was not even aware that Miss Brangwyn had recovered consciousness, but might be simply sleep-walking.

"That is quite impossible," asserted Howth. "While the spirit is absent, as in the trance, the body remains inert and unconscious until re-inhabited by its own or another's informing spirit. And from what you say, I have little doubt that such a transference has taken place in this instance."

"But," I asked, "have you any reason to suspect the existence or non-existence—I hardly know how to express it—of any such who must have been intimately acquainted with this poor girl's personality, and all the circumstances of her life?"

"I have my suspicions," answered Howth, "which will probably be confirmed before we are much older. We must lose no more time, however, before visiting the hospital, though I dread the effect of the change in her favourite on my wife, who is very much attached to her companion. This feeling Miss Brangwyn has always fully reciprocated, and there could be no stronger proof, to my mind, of the actual exchange of the genial soul we know so well for the malignant spirit you describe as animating Miss Brangwyn's personality, than the expressions of contempt and ill-will expressed by the latter for ourselves."

We lost no more time than was necessary in informing Mrs. Howth of the accident (as we described it) to her friend, in repairing to the hospital. On arriving there, we were told that the lady brought into the accident ward had already passed away.

A look of intense relief passed over Howth's face, but the grief of his wife was excessive.

"It is better so," whispered the husband to me as we stood around the narrow bed looking down at the calm face which was fast resuming its accustomed sweet and gracious expression. "I could have wished for some further light upon this mystery, but I am thankful that my wife need never know the truth of this sad story."

He looked tenderly towards his wife, who knelt with her face buried in the coverlet of the bed, so that she was unaware that at this moment a nurse glided up to her husband and put a folded paper into his hand.

"You are Mr. Howth, I believe, sir," she said *sotto voce*. "The poor lady there insisted upon her words being taken down and addressed to you. The doctors considered her to be raving in delirium but we could pacify her in no other way than by compliance."

My friend hastily concealed the paper and led his still weeping wife from the ward.

I followed, after arranging the matter of business with Hessel-tine which had proved so considerable a factor in connecting me with the terrible tragedy just passed, and upon Howth's invitation returned with them to their house. He had meanwhile given directions for the removal of the poor girl's remains to Wimbledon, and was anxious, as he said, to examine the contents of the paper in my presence.

They were meagre enough, as might be expected, dictated as they had been by one in mortal agony and in the very throes of death.

We read them after Mrs. Howth, exhausted by her agitation, had retired for the night, her husband hoping to keep her in ignorance of the worst feature of the tragedy.

And when he pointed out, in reply to my strongly-expressed doubts as to the possibility of this, that Mrs. Howth knew very little English and lived a most secluded life, I felt that it might be possible to spare her. Even we, strong men as we were, could not unmoved, nay, without horror, read such sentences as these :

"I have but a short time to live, but I cannot die without the certainty that my just revenge has been brought home to all concerned. The spirit which now speaks to you is that of Mathilde Hervieu, who has taken possession of the body of my abhorred rival, Maude Brangwyn, during the absence of her spirit in the trance, into which she could pass almost by an effort of her own will. My disembodied spirit has watched and waited for this opportunity since my 'death' months since, in order that I might be avenged on my perjured lover and on my false friend at one *coup*. I have accomplished my end, and I am satisfied."

This was all. As we came to the close of the short and shameful record, my friend and I gazed at each other in dismay.

"What is this new horror that is working in our midst in these latter days?" I exclaimed excitedly ; "a stirring of the dry bones of all the ancient superstitions, it appears to me, that have ever deluded poor puppet humanity."

"Say rather the coming to light of old and most vital truths, older than the oldest religions, but destined to evolve the newest and best developed of all. I can give you proof that these words we have just read are not mere idle boasting, but have a basis of sober fact.

"About six months since—mark the time—Miss Brangwyn received a letter entreating her to visit the death-bed of one who had known her in past days of prosperity, and who was dying in great distress of mind and body. The letter was signed Mathilde Hervieu, and gave an address in a street in one of the worst localities of London. You yourself must remember Mathilde Hervieu?"

"Indeed I do not," I replied. "She was usually away at school, or later, on visits, so that I never happened to meet her. She was, I am aware, a ward of old Anthony Brangwyn, and was brought up with his daughter as though she were his own child. But why she should plot against the girl with whom she habitually lived as a sister passes my comprehension."

"Ah, my good fellow," said Howth, "you have not yet plumbed the depths of the female heart and gauged its enormous capacity for jealousy. Not but what it was very hard upon poor Mathilde when she had all but secured the best match of his day—young Colvin, the millionaire painter—little Maude should return from a visit to some of her mother's connections, and should innocently and without an effort capture the painter with all his millions, which were nothing to her—the daughter of a millionaire, but which would have been so much to poor portionless Mathilde, to say nothing of the man's love, which she had fondly believed hers. She was, however, fain to bear her bitter disappointment in silence, for she had no 'case' whatever—the man who had not scrupled to win her heart had not spoken, had not 'committed' himself."

"But it seems, the intolerable sense of wrong rankled none the less in the heart of Mathilde Hervieu and poisoned her life, and, Spanish Creole as she was, she never forgave either her false lover or her innocent rival; not even when that rival, considering herself involved in the disgrace of her father's bankruptcy and downfall, refused to ratify her promise to Colvin (who was more than willing to fulfil his part of the contract) and broke off the engagement."

"But, what," I asked, as Howth paused overcome by the retrospect, "what was the result of the interview between the two girls, if indeed they met?"

"They met surely enough," he returned. "We did not oppose the interview, but countenanced it so far as to escort Miss Brangwyn ourselves, awaiting her return in the carriage near the house, so as to be within call should assistance be needed, for we had no great reason to trust Miss Hervieu's good faith.

"Maude returned to us more dead than alive. The dying woman had cursed her with almost her last breath, and had vowed her determination to make her presence felt by Maude, sleeping or waking, after her (Mathilde's) death—this menace to one of Maude's temperament was no idle one—and further, solemnly swore to be revenged upon both her and her faithless lover even after death, should opportunity serve."

"And what became of the wretched, unfortunate creature?" asked I, with my mind reverting to the magnificent home and brilliant society of which this very Mathilde had been the cherished inmate and ornament.

"She died in the night after Miss Brangwyn's visit," replied Howth. "We, of course, did what we could for her in her last moments, and gave her decent burial. There could hardly have been a life more unfortunate—for she had persistently rejected all offers of help and gone her own perverted way—or a death more tragic, unless it was that to which she had brought her innocent rival."

"She has fulfilled her threat at any rate," I said, "if we may trust appearances. What must have been the feelings of poor Colvin (for that was he, of course, who fell by her hand, though I did not recognize him at the moment) when he realized the girl's murderous intent, for, according to you, he had nothing with which to reproach himself on Maude's account at least."

"No, but," returned my friend, "the blanched face, the look of horror on his countenance, which you described to me, is almost convincing, I think, that at the supreme moment the conscience-stricken man recognized the avenging spirit of the woman he had wronged, even through the fair veil of Maude Brangwyn's mortal flesh."

The Face on the Wall.

IN the summer of 18— Major and Mrs. Crosbie returned from India and took a large house in one of the most lovely of the Yorkshire dales, on a three years' lease. It was a wild and solitary spot, but they particularly desired to live quietly in order to re-establish Major Crosbie's health, which had been much impaired by a long residence in the tropics ; so that in their opinion, the isolated position of the house was no drawback. The house, which faced due south, was a square three-storied edifice of grey stone ; in front, a lovely lawn stretched away in a gentle slope to a brook which ran through the garden ; east and west were two plantations of hoary weather-beaten pines, which on the west side sheltered a spacious kitchen garden, while on the east it stretched itself into an avenue of half-a-mile or more in length, at the end of which was the principal entrance. Immediately behind the house was a large square yard, round which were built the stables and the various outbuildings, and at the back of these ran the high road, beyond which was a vast expanse of breezy heather-covered moorland.

Owing to its lonely position, the house had been uninhabited for many years ; but, although showing signs of neglect, it was in pretty good repair, so that in a few months, under the energetic and artistic influence of the Crosbies, combined with a lavish expenditure of money, it had assumed a cheery and homelike appearance. Such neighbours as they had soon called on them ; but the distances between the different country houses was a very real barrier to any great intimacies, more especially as winter sets in early in our northern counties and the roads are *all* bad. Fortunately, the Crosbies were talented and accomplished people, with many resources in themselves, so that the lack of society did not trouble them so much as it might otherwise have done. Besides which the events which I am about to relate proved to be of most absorbing interest whilst they lasted.

The summer and autumn had passed rapidly away, and at the time my story begins it was the middle of November.

Mrs. Crosbie, a pretty little fair-haired woman, was sitting one evening after dinner with her feet on the fender-stool, plunged in a brown study; a dainty piece of silken embroidery lay neglected on the white bear rug at her feet in company with her fox-terrier Vic. Her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, she sat motionless, gazing at the fire, when the door opened and her husband came in.

"Why, Ethel, what are you thinking about?" he asked with a smile. "You are so preoccupied that you have forgotten my coffee."

"That is soon remedied," answered Mrs. Crosbie, stretching out her hand to the bell. "The fact is, I was debating whether I should tell you or not."

"Tell me what?" inquired Jack Crosbie, drawing an arm-chair to the fire and sinking into it lazily.

"Well, something rather queer that has happened the last two or three nights and that I can in no way account for."

"It sounds dreadfully mysterious," said her husband, smiling. "If it is anything very gruesome you had better not tell me, for fear of spoiling my night's rest."

Mrs. Crosbie smiled rather soberly, but did not at once answer.

The footman brought in the coffee, and while sipping it slowly, she said:

"If I could feel certain that it was merely imagination I should not say anything about it."

"Oh! never mind the *ifs*," replied her husband somewhat impatiently. "Begin at the beginning, and say what is the matter."

"If you really want to know, then," said Mrs. Crosbie reluctantly, "for the last four or five nights I have been hearing voices!"

Her husband laughed. "What kind of voices?" he asked, "and when?"

"At night, when I am in bed," continued Ethel. "It is most extraordinary. Every night I hear two people talking in the smoking-room" (which was immediately beneath Mrs. Crosbie's bedroom). "I can hear them quite distinctly, but I cannot distinguish any words. At first, I thought some of the servants must be sitting up talking in the kitchen, and had left the passage door open. I got up to see, but everything was quiet,

and all the lights were out. As soon as I got back into bed the noise began again. Last night I got up three or four times, thinking each time I *must* have been mistaken, and that the maids were sitting up, but it was not so. It really does seem rather funny."

Major Crosbie smiled a little and said :

"You are sure you were not dreaming, Ethel?"

"Perfectly certain," replied Mrs. Crosbie. "Don't I tell you that I got up and walked about?"

"At what time do these mysterious voices begin?" asked her husband.

"At eleven o'clock; they go on for an hour and a half or thereabouts, and then they stop."

"Well, to-night I will bring a book and sit in your room, and if I hear anything I will go and investigate."

Mrs. Crosbie's bedroom opened into that of her husband on one side and into the passage on the other; the windows of both rooms looked out on to the lawn and were immediately above the smoking and dining rooms; they were all large and lofty square rooms which did not lend themselves structurally to any mystifications. At eleven o'clock Jack Crosbie entered his wife's room. He found her sitting in her dressing-gown by the fire with a pink shaded reading lamp on a table at her side.

"How about the voices, so far?" he asked, as he sat down opposite to her.

"Oh! they have not begun yet," replied Mrs. Crosbie.

"And I don't suppose they ever will, save in your imagination," he replied.

"Well, we shall soon see," said his wife, smiling.

They chatted on indifferent subjects for a few minutes and then betook themselves to their respective books. Silence, unbroken save for the turning of the pages, reigned over the house; the wind sighed faintly in the pines, but all else was still, when, suddenly, a confused sound of voices broke out seemingly in one of the ground-floor rooms. Major Crosbie raised his head to listen and exclaimed:

"Why, my dear Ethel, if those are your mysterious voices, you are even more foolish than I thought you were; that is Janet apparently enjoying a somewhat noisy altercation with Wright on the stairs."

"You had better go and tell them to be quiet and send them off to bed," replied Mrs. Crosbie carelessly. "They will be coming up the back stairs."

Her husband left the room, and she sat watching the door with an amused smile on her lips. In a few minutes he returned looking slightly mystified.

"Well, did you tell them?" she asked with a laugh.

"They were not there at all," said Major Crosbie. "The lights are all out, and there is not a sound to be heard in the whole house."

"Well, listen now," answered his wife.

They listened and again the confused murmur became perceptible; two voices seemed to be talking, arguing, entreating, threatening, and gradually rising in wrath till the climax of the discussion seemed to have been reached, and they relapsed into silence. What was so curious and made the thing so uncanny was, that although the voices themselves were perfectly distinct, it was quite impossible to distinguish any words whatever. After an interval of about ten minutes, the whole thing began again. The Crosbies sat looking at one another in silence for some time; at last Mrs. Crosbie said in a half-whisper:

"Do you still think I am silly?"

"It is certainly very mysterious," replied her husband, "but it is absurd to fancy it is due to supernatural causes; there *must* be some reason for it. Most probably it is the wind forcing its way down some old chimney or pipe that we know nothing of. I will make a thorough investigation to-morrow; in the meanwhile, you had better go to bed, and if you are frightened, I will sit here till you get to sleep."

"Oh! I am not frightened," replied Ethel, "but it is not nearly finished yet; it goes on at intervals like this for about an hour and a half. There it is again." And as she spoke, the uncanny conversation was resumed; two voices seemed to be taking part in it; one, a woman's voice, soft and sweet, with agonizing tones of entreaty, which at times became shrill and sharp with terror; the other, a man's voice, low, rough and husky, with cruel intonations and savage inflections. What could they be talking about? was always the question present in Mrs. Crosbie's mind, dominating even her fear, for although she would not own to it, she really was frightened. At half-past twelve the sounds ceased altogether and the Crosbies retired to rest.

The next day, Major Crosbie, assisted by his valet (who had been his soldier-servant when with his regiment), made a thorough and exhaustive inspection of the whole house, but discovered nothing that could in any way account for the extraordinary occurrence of the previous night. The smoking-room was most carefully examined, but presented no peculiar features, beyond the fact that on the left-hand side of the fireplace was a deep recess, and that on the right-hand side there was none, the wall being flush with the fireplace. There being no cupboard in the room adjoining to account for the extra thickness of the wall in that place, Major Crosbie was fain to believe that it was merely a builder's freak, and was unable to connect it, even in the remotest manner, with the sounds which he sought to explain. He felt quite at a loss, but determined to sit up again that evening in company with Wright, intending to search the smoking-room thoroughly as soon as the voices began.

He persuaded his wife to change bedrooms with him, which she was pleased to do, and whilst enjoining the strictest secrecy on Wright, he told him he would be wanted to share in the vigil. Accordingly, eleven o'clock found master and man awaiting the beginning of the ghostly conversation, each armed with a bull's-eye lantern. They had not long to wait; it seemed to take place exactly beneath them, near the fireplace, on the side where there was no recess: arguing, entreating, imploring, menacing, threatening, and then the dead silence; to begin all over again after a short interval.

After having heard it once or twice, they started on an inspection tour all round the house, but everything was perfectly quiet until they came to the smoking-room. Wright opened the door and stood aside, holding the handle to let the major pass in. As soon as they were fairly in the room, they became aware that this was the place in which the mysterious persons, or rather voices, conversed. A dreadful feeling seemed to convince them that they were not alone in the room: some invisible presence seemed to be there filling them with inexplicable terror. Moved by the same impulse, they turned the light of their lanterns on the place close to them whence the voices seemed to come; but there was nothing: still the confused murmur went on, perfectly audible as to sound, quite indistinguishable as to words, until, the usual climax having been reached, it died into silence. At the

same moment, the light in both lanterns was suddenly extinguished, and Major Crosbie felt his arm tightly gripped by Wright, who whispered :

" Oh ! sir, look on the wall ; look on the wall."

Major Crosbie turned round and saw on the wall, at the right-hand side of the fireplace, a most peculiar apparition. It was a rather small blueish-white spot, which quivered and wavered about like a trembling ray of moonshine ; but as he looked, it gained in intensity and ceased to move. He was thus enabled to make out the semblance of a hand, a woman's hand, thin and emaciated, the palm turned outwards, the finger tips torn and bleeding, and the joints strained and tense as if the hand were pushing against something with all its might. It was about six feet from the ground, and nothing else, save a couple of inches of delicate ivory-white wrist, was visible.

Dumb with amazement, Major Crosbie stared speechlessly at the little hand, wondering if by any chance he could be asleep and dreaming. Almost at his elbow, the ghostly voices once more began their altercation, but he was so engrossed in looking at the hand that he scarcely noticed them. Wright was in a dreadful fright and clung hard to his master's arm as the only refuge against the overpowering sense of creeping horror which had come over them both. Suddenly, the voices having again ceased, after having reached their usual angry climax, the two men became aware that about a foot below the apparition of the hand another object had become visible. It was a face ; a woman's face, pale and drawn and filled with an agonizing look of terror ; horror-stricken, the dark grey eyes gazed straight at them, the pupils dilated with helpless fear ; the lovely curved lips were pinched and drawn up over the small white teeth ; a mass of golden curls hung low on her forehead. Breathless, the two men gazed at the face on the wall until the speechless horror it expressed seemed to communicate itself to them, and with one impulse, sick with fright, utterly incapable of saying how they got there, they found themselves outside the smoking-room in the passage. Silently they went up the stairs to Major Crosbie's bedroom, and it was not until they found themselves there that either of them cared to speak.

By this time they had been able to collect their senses and Major Crosbie was rather ashamed of his precipitate retreat.

"Well, Wright," he said, "and what did you see?"

"Faith, sir, I'm thinking I saw just what you did," said Wright seriously, "and a mighty queer thing it was too!"

"How was it our lanterns went out so suddenly?" asked Major Crosbie.

"They didn't go out, sir," answered Wright; "they were *put* out."

"Well, I have had enough ghost hunting for one night," said his master, "so I shall go to bed now and you had better do the same. We will have a good search all over the house to-morrow and I will go and ask the agent if this house is supposed to be haunted. In the meantime, be careful not to say anything about what we saw either to Mrs. Crosbie or to the maids."

The next day, the whole house, and more particularly the smoking-room, was submitted to a more searching investigation than the former one, with the same fruitless result. The agent, when questioned, denied any knowledge of the house being haunted, and, in fact, made sarcastic remarks which somewhat nettled Major Crosbie, knowing, as he did, that he had been most thoroughly alarmed. Mrs. Crosbie was naturally very anxious to hear the result of the midnight vigil, but to her disappointment, she found both her husband and the man servant singularly reticent on the subject.

On the following day, two of Major Crosbie's former brother officers arrived for a few weeks' shooting, and in the bustle attendant on their arrival the peculiarities of the smoking-room were forgotten until the evening, when they all adjourned thither, for their post-prandial smoke. The clock striking eleven recalled the event to Major Crosbie's recollection.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I hope neither of you fellows are afflicted with nerves, because we run a regular ghost show in this room and it is just about this time that the performance begins."

His friends looked slightly incredulous, and he gave them a rapid sketch of what had taken place the evening before.

"Oh, we must see this out," exclaimed Captain Lawrence gaily. "You had better call Wright and we will make a night of it. What did you say?" he asked quickly of Major Crosbie.

"I did not say anything," replied the major, looking slightly surprised.

"Oh, I thought I heard some one speak, so concluded it was you."

"It is more likely to be our invisible friends," returned Jack Crosbie, lowering his voice slightly. A slight pause ensued, during which the voices became distinctly audible; the two newcomers listened in amazement, looking all round the room to discover whence the voices proceeded, but of course they saw nothing.

"We will keep the lamps lit," said Major Crosbie, "and that will enable us to see if there is any humbug going on." Hardly were the words out of his mouth when all three lamps went out and the voices began again. At the same time, the hand became distinctly visible on the wall opposite and a few minutes after the face. Major Crosbie experienced the same awful sensation of horror creeping over him and felt certain that the two others were similarly affected. Silently they sat, watching the entreating, agonized expression of the beautiful face and the awful terror in the dark grey eyes; so intense was the feeling they inspired that all three men ceased to think of the face as a ghostly one, but almost imagined that it was a real person, suffering untold cruelties, which they seemed forced by some invisible power to witness without being able to prevent. The minutes sped on, each one increasing the sickening fear and horror which possessed the spectators, until with one accord they made for the door and found themselves pale and trembling in the passage.

"Great Scott," said Captain Lawrence, "what was it? I would not go through that again for something. Have you no idea what it is, Crosbie?"

"Not the slightest," replied the major. "And what is more, I am at a loss to account for the awful sensation of fright which seizes on one by degrees. The face alone does not produce that effect, as I do not feel in the least alarmed by it; but there is some strange sort of presence in the room which is terrible and which, I am bound to say, paralyses me with fear."

"Yes, I also had the sensation you describe," rejoined Colonel Wheeler, "and I account for it in this way: I am certain we were not alone in that room; there was some other ghostly presence and a malevolent one to boot. How otherwise account for the intense sympathy with that agonized, terrified face, followed by the utter horror and dread, which gave one the sensation of being helpless spectators of some awful crime? It was really

horrible and I am not ashamed to say that I was in a most terrible funk."

"It will be best for all of us to try and forget it in sleep," said Major Crosbie, "and to-morrow, I will have that wall pulled down to see if we can account for this ghastly vision in any way. If not, we must leave the house, for one really cannot go on living with that sort of thing happening every night; it would be altogether too wearing."

The trio separated for the night and the next morning found them busily assisting the mason who had come to pull down the wall. When they had reached the centre, they came upon a little sort of cell about two feet square and six feet high; there was just room for one man to stand upright in it without moving. On the floor they found the bones of a human skeleton, which on examination proved to be those of a female. This discovery rather staggered the finders, but it confirmed their opinion that some terrible crime or tragedy had taken place in the house. Was it possible that the body of some murdered victim had been disposed of in that little cell? or, more awful still, had she been buried alive in it? Something of the sort must certainly have taken place to account for the bones being there at all. Major Crosbie had them carefully removed and buried in a remote corner of the churchyard, and from that time the smoking-room was free of the dreadful sights and the spectral voices. But somehow or other, the house never felt comfortable, and very shortly after the discovery of the skeleton, Major and Mrs. Crosbie left for the south, forfeiting the remainder of their lease. Their ostensible reason was the severity of the northern climate, but in reality, they never felt quite sure that they might not, at some future date, see once again the face on the wall.

ELAINE A. SWIRE.

"Not in the Trodden Paths."

BY GERTRUDE WARDEN.

"They are but burrs, cousin, thrown upon thee in holiday foolery : if we walk not in the trodden paths, our very petticoats will catch them."—*Celia*,
"*As You Like It*."

"No, I don't know that I am unconventional," she said, "though people have called me so. I certainly can never be induced to believe anything by the argument that others have believed it before me. No, I don't go in for 'women's rights' or for 'movements' of any kind. Do I sympathize with the 'revolting daughters?' After all, do they exist? It is only the plain ones who revolt, I think; the pretty ones are too much occupied by their love affairs. Do I think girls ought to have a latch-key and a *wanderjahr*? I had both, and they didn't make me any happier. Will I tell you my story? Certainly; but I warn you that I am not abnormally truthful. Will I talk as though to an old friend? Certainly not. I couldn't be so frank with an old friend: I should be afraid of losing his friendship. Haven't I any women friends? I know and like a great many women, but I don't confide in them. They are too critical, and too apt to 'speir out' where the 'flats don't jine.' If you please a man, he believes you for the time. Do I like men better than women? Should I be a woman if I did not?"

She turned and laughed as she spoke. Her laugh began in her eyes and then lifted the corners of her mouth. There was an innate coquetry about her which was undeterred by my age or sex. I am a woman writer, well into the fifties; she looked five-and-twenty when she smiled, thirty when she thought. I sat on a camp-stool on the deck of a Dublin boat, and she posed against the rail as she talked, not unmindful of the effect of a trim figure, a bright complexion, and neat feet in high-heeled shoes on the male passengers.

"When you talk of unconventionality," she went on, "I must say this: that all my life I have been disproving for my own

satisfaction popular sayings. For instance, all about 'childhood's happy days.' As a child, I was generally miserable and always in disgrace; I was for ever longing to grow up so that I might be the scolder instead of the scolded. Then, too, they tell you a child naturally loves its parents. I rather liked papa, when he was in a good temper; but my mother was a formidable person with a voice, who sang 'La ci darem' as if it were a war-song; and when she gave a dinner party I used to hang about outside the door and wish she wouldn't make such bad jokes. When my father died insolvent I was delighted to leave home and earn my own living, and as a governess I was not in the least ill treated, nor did the master of the house fall in love with me. When I left off teaching and went on the stage the unexpected went on happening. I did not lose my head, or forget my words, or see the theatre spinning round me on my first appearance, and I never was a great success. Also, although I had fortified myself by chilling phrases ready to quell the wicked earls and barons who were expected to hang round the stage-door and persecute me, none of them ever came. Behind the scenes of a London comedy theatre I found to be as safe as a church, and stage life after a time extremely monotonous.

Did I fall in love with an actor? Why, no. The pretty-part-playing actors were too vain and the character actors too ugly. And then, too, I was in love with a briefless barrister all the time.

And here's another fallacious saying: That one can't love where one does not respect. Love, of the passionate sort, seems to me to be an animal instinct which has no more to do with respect than algebra. Regie had brown eyes, a curly black moustache, high spirits, a loud laugh, and always wore beautiful boots and collars. He couldn't spell, and he never intentionally said anything worth listening to. Yet I adored him. He had only to put his hand on my shoulder and I thrilled all over as though I had received a galvanic shock. He was very much in love with me because he thought me pretty; but he despised my intelligence, which was perhaps not surprising on his part, since he knew how much I loved him. He would have liked me to run away with him, which was of course out of the question; but he did not want to marry, as he liked to spend all his money on himself.

At last he quarrelled with me over a trifle, and as I was counting the minutes every day between the postman's knocks, hoping he would make it up, I received a letter from a mutual friend telling me of Regie's marriage on the preceding day.

I was such a fool that I cried myself into something like brain fever, and something seemed to go snap where my heart was. His wife was a very go-a-head sort of woman with canary-coloured hair and an unlikely complexion; she had a little money, which they soon spent. Then one day a friend I met in a shop told me Regie was utterly ruined and nearly starving, lying ill in lodgings of rheumatic fever, while his wife had "bolted with another man," so my informant put it.

I want to tell you just at this point that I was not in love with Regie then, but I *had* loved him so much once that I could not let him die like that. I found him out in miserable rooms, not very far from the street where I lived. I tidied them up and made them habitable, and then, as I could not afford to get him a nurse, I looked after him myself every moment that I was not at the theatre, except for the few hours' rest I occasionally snatched in my own rooms. He was most awfully ill and didn't know me for days, a sulky, slovenly, and very blasphemous invalid.

No, he didn't utter my name in delirium; mine was, I think, about the only female name he did *not* utter. And when he recognized me he got cross and wretched, so that I was glad to get him into a convalescent hospital to get well. Then my health broke down. I wasn't used to nursing, and it took it out of me. I had to give up my engagement, and feared I might starve, when a most unexpected legacy came to me from a relative whose existence I had forgotten. With the money I went to Italy under the wing of an elderly lady I hired as companion. It seemed quaint, when I had taken care of myself so long, to start a watch-dog at seven-and-twenty.

At a Florentine hotel I met Sir William Clavering, a wealthy country gentleman and bachelor of forty, rather stout, rather bald, very orthodox, very proud of his family: he asked me to marry him and I said yes.

Was I in love with him? Not a bit. But he was very kind, and I wanted some one to take care of me: I was oh! so tired of floating about the world by myself.

Did I regret my latch-key freedom and the scent of the foot-lights? Not once, although I had to go to church twice on Sundays and entertain county people to dinner; hunting and turnips sometimes palled as subjects of conversation; but luckily the village doctor had a sense of humour.

Nearly a year of gloriously uneventful life passed, and then an awful thing came to my ears. I had heard and seen nothing of Regie since his illness. In a solicitor's office I learned that, having recently come into some money, he had commenced an action for divorce against his wife, and that she, enraged beyond measure because he would not forgive her, intended to bring a counter charge against her husband and *me*!

The news seemed to turn me to stone. It appeared incredible that she should have ferreted out the details of my ordinary humanity to a dying man and dared to put an evil construction upon them. Even if by lies, false witnesses and innuendoes, she failed to prove anything, my life of peace, so long retarded so hard to win, would be utterly destroyed, and I felt I could never survive the shame of having my husband's name, so much respected, bandied about by every street-boy. I was off my head, I think, for, having come to town by stealth to my solicitor's office, and hearing there that the case would come into court in two days' time, I wandered all day, half-crazed, about the streets, and actually tried to nerve myself into suicide from Waterloo Bridge on a dreary, rainy night in April.

Why didn't I tell my husband? If you had known him, you would not ask that. Lady Clavering must be as Cæsar's wife, in his opinion.

Then the unexpected again stepped in. You have thought, haven't you, as I did, perhaps, that Regie was utterly heartless and ungrateful? Well, that very day on which I stood shivering with wet feet in the puddles on Waterloo Bridge, peering over into that horrible black water below, Regie met his wife by appointment at her solicitor's and implored her to strike out my name, offering to withdraw the case. She was spiteful, and refused point blank. The solicitor, who was present, told me that Regie tried every argument in vain. At last he said very coolly:

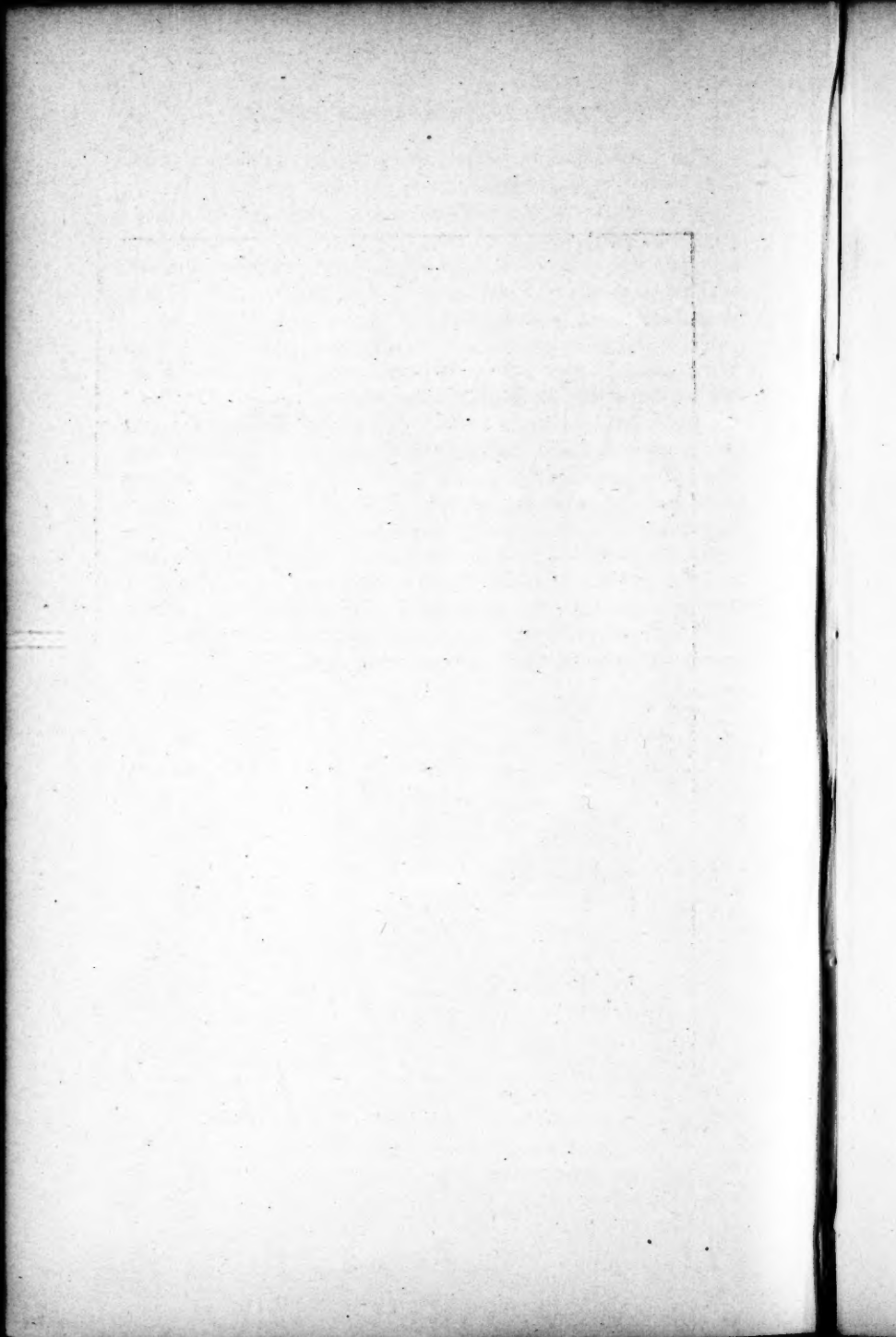
"That woman saved my life. I will not have her name dragged through the mire of a divorce court to satisfy your spite."



THE NEWS SEEMED TO TURN ME TO STONE.

NOT IN THE TRODDEN PATHS.
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With that, before they could stop him, he whipped a pistol from his pocket and blew his brains out.

Crying, am I? Very silly and unbecoming, and it all happened six years ago. My little girl was born a few months later, and I've been a widow for nearly two years now. I'm out of crape, as you see. I couldn't wear mourning for Regie, but I wore black in my heart for him.

Sir William was the kindest of husbands and my child will be quite a little heiress ; no struggling, starving days, no disappointed ambitions, no broken heart, and no latch-keys for *her* ! I want her to be happy, in a nice sheltered way, as women should be. And I hope and pray that when she is a woman she may marry the man she loves and be happy with him, not just contented and peaceable with one who loves her. I want her to have everything—everything I missed.

It's a mistake to tell one's own history, or a colourable version of it, in public. It makes one's eyes and nose red. Don't I ever use a sunshade? Seldom. I have a theory that a sunbath is a good thing for the complexion, and I'm a little bit proud of a skin like mine at four-and thirty !'

Eileen :

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

"I LEAVE her to your care, Rupert ; look after my little girl when I am gone."

"I will, old friend, I will ; her happiness shall ever be my first and last thought."

"God bless and reward you, dear old fellow." The two comrades clasped hands with much affection.

A few days later and all was over. George Haviland was laid to rest, and Eileen, his "little girl," was sobbing out her first passionate grief in the kindly arms of her father's old friend.

Tenderly he soothed and comforted her, and, when a month or two had elapsed, brought her to his beautiful country home, thinking that change of scene would, in some measure, help to soften her grief.

It was a cold, dreary day in December when they reached Longstone Hall, the stately mansion which was henceforth to be Eileen's home. Great fires were burning in the large hall, lighting up the carved oaken furniture, and casting fitful gleams upon the polished floor, with its gay eastern rugs.

"Welcome, my dear child, to Longstone. May it prove a happy home to you," and Rupert Grahame touched his ward's forehead lightly with his lips, as he pushed aside the heavy velvet curtains, and led her through into the light.

Very sweet and winsome Eileen looked, as she stood, with the soft mellow glow from the tall shaded lamps falling upon her. The heavy travelling cloak had slipped aside, and her slight figure looked very childish and pathetic in its deep mourning. She threw off her hat and ran her fingers lightly through the soft golden curls which lay upon her low white brow.

"Oh ! I am *so* tired," she said, with a little wistful sigh, which ended almost in a sob.

"You shall go to your room at once, Eileen. Perhaps you

would rather not come down to dinner to-night ; if so, one of the maids shall bring you something upstairs."

"Thank you. Yes, I should like that best, if you will not mind," and the slender figure passed wearily up the broad oak staircase, accompanied by a bright-faced, cheery-looking maid-servant, bearing her wraps.

"Poor child, poor little girl," Rupert Grahame murmured, as he passed into the library. "She has taken her father's death very much to heart, and no wonder ; Haviland was a splendid fellow."

"These are your rooms, miss," and the rosy-cheeked maid threw open a door and stood aside to allow Eileen to enter.

"Oh, how very pretty !" The exclamation came involuntarily as Eileen entered the dainty little sitting-room which had been prepared for her.

A bright fire was burning on the open-tiled hearth, rich silken curtains were drawn across the deep windows, a reading stand was placed beside a luxurious lounge, close by stood an exquisitely carved writing table, with a shaded lamp beside it. In one corner of the room was a Broadwood piano, while another held a book-case of rare workmanship, filled with the works of standard authors in choicest bindings of white and gold. Delicate hothouse flowers made the air heavy with their perfume, and graceful, shadowy palms were scattered about in careless profusion. Beyond lay a pretty bed and dressing room, all furnished with the same thoughtful care and charming elegance. Eileen glanced gratefully around ; she had a keen love of the beautiful, and luxury was almost a necessity to her.

She sank into a low chair with a little sigh of content. Phœbe, the deft-handed maid, quickly removed her wraps, and, unpacking one of the large travelling trunks, soon replaced the heavy mourning robe with a dainty, white, fur-bordered wrapper.

"May I loose your hair, miss ?" she asked presently, glancing admiringly at the silky, golden coils.

"Thank you," Eileen returned, "I shall be glad if you will ; my head aches dreadfully."

When the pins were removed and the long hair fell about the slender form in heavy waves and ripples of shimmering gold, Phœbe could scarcely repress her admiration. She was rapidly becoming greatly enamoured of the lovely, fairy-like little lady who was henceforth to be her mistress, and, when Eileen chatted

pleasantly to her as she brushed out the long, heavy locks, her heart was quite won, and she confidently asserted that evening in the servants' hall, that Miss Haviland was the nicest, sweetest and prettiest young lady it had ever been her good fortune to see, and that serving her would be a real pleasure.

CHAPTER II.

A YEAR slipped rapidly away, leaving Eileen but little changed.

The deep sorrow occasioned by her father's death had become softened and chastened by the lapse of time, which is surely the truest and surest of all healers.

Faithfully had her guardian striven to fulfil his trust and make his friend's "little girl" happy. Had he succeeded?

He often asked himself this question. True, she was bright and cheerful—nay, he would often say she was like sunshine in the house; but at times he would notice a wistful expression in the deep blue eyes, and the sweet lips would take a mournful droop which his heart ached to see.

One day he spoke to her of it.

"Why do you look so sad, my child?" he asked tenderly, laying his hand caressingly upon the golden head.

Eileen turned from the window, where she had been standing watching the sunset with thoughtful eyes.

"Do I look sad? I didn't know. I was thinking—that was all."

"Of what, dear? May, I not know?"

"Oh, I cannot tell you. My thoughts are long, long thoughts." She shivered slightly and turned away from the kind, searching eyes.

"My little girl," the deep tones grew very tender, "what is it? Are you not happy with me?"

"Oh yes, dear. You are so good to me," and the ready tears sprang to her eyes.

"Then what is troubling you? Will you not tell me, little Lena?"

"Ah!" she cried suddenly, "you must not call me *that*; I cannot bear it;" then, with a sob, broke from his gentle, detaining hand and fled up to her room. Flinging herself upon the bed, great scalding tears rolled heavily down her face. Just a chance word had unlocked the flood-gates of the long past, and

bitter-sweet memories came crowding up. When her guardian so innocently called her by the name which had once been given to her by one whom she had loved better than life, it had seemed to bring past years before her with sudden, overwhelming vividness, and, clenching her tiny hands, she sobbed unrestrainedly.

"Oh, Jack! Jack!" she moaned, "why do you not write to me? All these long, long months and never a word from you." Then, springing up, pacing the room with quick, impatient steps, "Oh, how shall I bear my life if I am never to see him again? I cannot, cannot bear it. I am hungering for a sight of his dear face."

She unlocked a drawer and took out a packet of letters, tied together with a silken ribbon. These she read and re-read, her tears falling heavily upon them. Then she drew forth a photograph of a dark handsome man, apparently about thirty years of age, with a heavy drooping moustache, dark hair (cropped close in military fashion), and eloquent, smiling eyes.

Again and again she pressed it to her lips. "He cannot be false; it is impossible," she murmured. "And yet—and yet, why does he not write? Jack! Jack! you are breaking my heart with your silence."

The months rolled by, and still no word came from her absent lover, and at length Eileen began to think he must be dead.

"If he were living I should have had news of him ere this," she would whisper to herself at night, as she tossed wearily upon her little white bed.

Her life was a quiet and uneventful one, leaving her too much time for thought. One day her guardian met her as she came in from the garden, her hands full of flowers.

"You look a veritable Flora, Eileen," he said gaily, surveying, with manifest pleasure, the dainty white-robed figure with the great clusters of yellow and damask roses held against her breast.

"Are they not lovely?" she cried, holding them out to him.

"Very lovely." But it was upon her, not the flowers, his eyes rested as he spoke. He leant over the table, watching the white hands busy themselves in filling bowls and vases with the fragrant blooms. Presently she stopped, with a little cry.

"Ah! see how I have torn my finger. What a pity that roses

have thorns. I sometimes think they are like human lives," she went on ; "often all fair and sweet at the top, but beneath, in almost every life, thorns."

"But what should you know of them, dear child? Your path should be strewn with thornless roses."

She sighed, a little wistfully, and he continued, after a brief pause, capturing both her hands and holding them tightly within his own :

"Eileen, listen for a moment. Since your father left you to me, more than a year ago, you have each day grown more dear to me, till you have come to be the very light of my eyes. Dearest one, I love you better than my life. Ah, I have startled you," as he felt her hands tremble and grow cold. "I did not mean to speak yet, if ever, of my love; for how can I expect a girl like you to care for an old fellow such as I? But, oh, dear heart, no young lover will ever love you more truly."

"I did not know," she faltered; "I never thought—it is all so sudden."

"My little girl," he cried, "forgive me. Forget what I have said if you will; only do not look so startled."

"Nay," she said softly, "I have nothing to forgive, and there is not so much love in my life that I can afford to forget yours."

"Dear one," he cried tenderly, his face glowing, "do you, can you, care for me just a little in return? Will you give me the hope that one day I may call you—my wife?"

What a wealth of love he threw into those two last words. Then he paused, waiting for her answer.

Swiftly the thought of handsome, debonair Jack Leighton flashed through her mind.

"He is either dead or faithless," she thought; "in either case he is lost to me. I must try to forget him. I cannot grieve my father's dearest friend."

So her resolution was quickly taken.

"If you think me worthy," she said with sweet humility, "I shall be proud to be your wife."

Did he notice that there was no word of love in her low reply?

Perhaps not, for he appeared more than content as he drew her to him in a long, loving embrace.

The months sped on, but there was not much quiet for Eileen after this, for Grahame sent for a distant cousin of his own to

come, with her husband and children, to stay till after the wedding, and, with their advent, all quietness fled.

Mrs. Ryde was a smart, bustling little woman, her husband a big, burly fellow who adored his wife, and their children two rosy-cheeked, good-tempered little lads of six and eight years of age, who speedily devoted themselves to Eileen, becoming her avowed slaves and admirers.

Their mother was not behindhand in her admiration of the fair-faced little bride, whom she at once took to her motherly heart.

"Why, you little bit of a thing," she exclaimed when they were alone together in Eileen's room, settled down for a cosy chat such as all women love, "you look a perfect baby in that soft, pink gown, with your hair all loose about your face. No, no, don't alter it, it suits you so."

Eileen laughed and blushed, as she nestled upon a cushion beside her new friend's knee.

"And to think you will soon be Rupert's wife," the little woman continued after a pause, during which her fingers strayed caressingly among Eileen's bright curls.

"Ah, lassie, if you were my girl you shouldn't be thinking of marriage yet awhile, for indeed you're 'ower young to marry yet,' as the song says. I was twenty-five when I was married, and that is quite soon enough for any girl to give up her liberty, though I can remember thinking my mother dreadfully hard-hearted when she refused to let me marry a youth with whom I fell desperately in love when I was only sixteen. Poor dear mother, I have lived to acknowledge that her decision was a wise one."

"I scarcely remember my mother," Eileen said softly. "I was only four years old when she died, but there was a look in your eyes when you were kissing your little boys 'good-night' which made me think of her, and the touch of your hand on my head seemed to bring my childhood back again; I think she must have touched me like that."

Esther Ryde's kindly eyes grew dim, and she bent her head to kiss the wistful upturned face.

"Poor Eileen, poor little motherless girl," she murmured tenderly. . . .

'Twas a glorious day in early spring when Eileen Haviland

became Eileen Grahame ; one of those radiant days which seem to bring a foretaste of summer's sweetness and beauty with them.

The sun shone from a cloudless sky, overhead the birds sang their clearest melodies, and all nature seemed thrilling with gladness and beauty.

The picturesque little village church had been lavishly decorated with flowers for the occasion. Great vases of pure white lillies stood upon the altar, huge branches of white lilac were strewn about, and sweet, dewy violets, nestling amid their cool green leaves, lent a delicious fragrance to the still morning air. It all seemed like a dream to Eileen. She saw a slim, graceful, white-robed figure looking forth from her mirror with misty, wistful blue eyes. She saw a golden head with its snowy veil and wreath of bridal blossoms, and then, with the same strange feeling of unreality, she turned away to meet faithful Phoebe's admiring gaze, as she stood proudly holding the exquisite bouquet of white roses which Rupert Grahame had procured for his bride.

Calm and still as one in a dream she stood when Esther Ryde, rosy with excitement, came bustling into the room, radiant in a marvellous costume of palest silver grey.

"Yes, I am ready now."

Were those dull, lifeless tones really her own, or was this merely some play in which she was acting a part? she wondered vaguely.

Poor little Eileen.

On up the aisle she went, leaning on Walter Ryde's kindly arm, and followed by his two little sons, in dainty "Jack Tar" costumes of white and blue.

On, on, up to the altar steps, where the lillies stood tall and stately and the violets wafted her a welcome. Then she stood beside a tall, manly form, with clear-cut, aristocratic features, and hair thick and waving, though white as her bridal gown.

"Dearly beloved," the rector began, in low, impressive tones. Then presently he paused, and she heard an earnest, deep-voiced "I will," from the man at her side.

"And forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?"

Was it to her those words were addressed? "*Forsaking all*

other." She shivered, and grew white as the flowers she carried. Mrs. Ryde leant anxiously forward and gently touched her arm.

A long-drawn sigh broke from the white lips, then with an effort Eileen recovered herself, and whispered her responses in faint, mechanical tones.

It was over, and a ringing peal of joy bells burst forth, as Eileen stepped from the shady, silent church into the golden sunshine, where the village children, with their pinafores full of great yellow daffodils, stood awaiting her advent.

Down the flower-strewn path she walked, her hand upon her husband's arm; then, when they gained the carriage, one tiny maiden, more venturesome than the rest, flung in a bunch of primroses, which fell in Eileen's lap.

Quickly she tossed them aside. "Oh," she cried, "not primroses, they have such an unhappy meaning."

Grahame smiled down upon her.

"So sweet a flower should have a happy meaning, should it not?" he said brightly.

"Ah, but they have not," she returned slowly; "they mean sadness, early youth and sadness."

Her husband picked up the poor little blossoms and threw them from the window. "There goes all sadness, then, my darling, for what in common have it and youth?" Then gathering her to him, closely, tenderly, "Do not even think of sadness, dearest heart of mine," he whispered; "it shall have no place in your life if I can prevent it. My little flower, my heart's idol—*my wife.*"

CHAPTER III.

TWO young men were lounging upon a shady bank beside a river, idly watching the lines they were plying, as they lay, stretched at their ease, upon a broiling day in midsummer.

"Got a light, Temple?" one asked the other presently, tossing away an empty matchbox.

"By Jove!" the younger man exclaimed, producing the desired "light," and bringing an unopened letter from the pocket of his tweed coat at the same time. "By Jove! I'd clean forgotten the mater's letter."

His companion made no reply, but watched, with lazy content, the faint blue smoke curl slowly from between his lips, as he puffed away at his well-coloured meerschaum.

The other proceeded to read the neglected epistle.

"The mater bids me take care of myself," he remarked, with a chuckle of amusement, "and hopes I am not working too hard this hot weather," at which they both laughed. "Well, the deuce!" he ejaculated a moment later, his blue eyes opening widely.

"What's the damage?" and Jack Leighton surveyed the speaker from between his half-closed lids, as he lay back upon the soft turf, his straw hat tilted over his forehead.

"Well, if this doesn't lick creation!" Hal Temple exclaimed, with a roar of laughter. "The old Hermit has gone and been and got—*married*," with another burst of laughter.

"Who is the Hermit?" Leighton queried languidly.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know; he's an old fellow who has a place near my father's; he is our nearest neighbour in fact. And to think of him getting married! Why, I thought he was a confirmed old bachelor. But there! one can never tell. Shouldn't wonder if we do the same thing ourselves some day. Eh Jack?"

"Speak for yourself, my boy. You know *my* sentiments," Leighton returned:

" ' You may cut it on his tombstone,
You may carve it on his card,
That a young man married
Is a young man marred.' "

he quoted lightly.

"The mater says he has married his ward," Temple went on, referring to the letter which he still held in his hand, "a girl young enough to be his daughter, and very lovely."

"Ah, those old buffers often have uncommonly good taste," and Leighton gave a short laugh as he refilled his pipe.

"They are looking forward at home to our visit, and hope you will arrange to spend all your leave with us at Lowescroft."

"Thanks, old fellow; it's awfully good of your people to ask me," Leighton returned, "and I shall enjoy the change immensely."

Thus it came about that a couple of months later the two friends left their regiment and its duties far behind them and prepared to spend a three months' leave of absence at Lowescroft Manor, the country house of Temple *père*.

They were warmly welcomed by Hal's bevy of pretty sisters, who were prepared to make much of the new-comers, promising their only brother all kinds of festivity, and extending their kind offices in no less a degree to his handsome friend.

"What's the shooting going to be like, dad?" Hal asked, as they sat at dinner the evening after their arrival.

"Very fair, I think, my boy; very fair. You two are crack shots, I suppose, eh?" and Mr. Temple glanced up from beneath his bushy brows as he helped himself to another glass of his favourite port.

"Leighton is," Hal said boyishly, looking down the long table to where his friend was engaged in an incipient flirtation with the prettiest of the five sisters.

"Who is taking my name in vain?" he queried in his slow, languid tones.

"I was telling the pater what a swell shot you are, and how you will enjoy the shooting," Hal explained.

"Oh!" cried one of the girls, a little slight thing, with short brown hair curling about her head, and great pathetic-looking brown eyes. "Oh, *don't* talk about shooting. I hate to hear you speak of it, it seems so horribly cruel, and you men call it *sport*!"

There was infinite contempt in that last word, and the soft brown eyes flashed. The others laughed, and her father reached forward to pull one of her curls.

"Oh, Hal," exclaimed Milly, the second, and his favourite sister, "what do you think? We all have invitations to a garden party at Longstone on the 3rd; we have one here a couple of days later, and dad has arranged for a picnic, which is to finish up with a dance on the 10th. There! doesn't all that take your breath away?"

"It does indeed, Mill; you should have broken it more gently. The first part is especially astounding. Imagine the Hermit coming out of his shell to the extent of a garden party! But after his marriage I shall be surprised at nothing."

"Ah, that marriage was a surprise to us all," observed Mrs Temple. "But indeed, Hal, you must no longer call Mr. Grahame a hermit; his wife seems to have worked wonders, and he is no longer the recluse he used to be."

"He is a living and most emphatic negative to the burning

question, 'Is marriage a failure?'" laughed Milly, "and looks years younger in spite of his white locks."

* * * *

The day of the Longstone garden party dawned brilliantly. There was a slight tinge of autumn in the air, and the trees were just beginning to acquire the exquisite tints which so often delight the eye in early autumn.

On the low stone steps which led up to the house Eileen stood, with her husband, to receive their guests.

Very lovely she looked in a gown of soft white cloth, with no touch of colour about her save a bunch of late damask roses, fastened in the gold clasp of her belt.

It was a fancy of Rupert Grahame's for his wife to dress in white; it became her fair young face so perfectly, he said; so to-day she was all white, from her dainty shoes to the snowy plumes in her "picture" hat.

At length all had arrived and were dispersed in little groups about the picturesque grounds.

Some played tennis with much enthusiasm, while croquet, archery, and many other games were provided for those who preferred a less active form of amusement.

On the terrace a string band discoursed sweet music, and in the distance could be heard the soft plashing of oars upon the lake.

Like a swift white bird Eileen fluttered about among her guests, with graceful attentions and kindly words for one and all. Presently she heard a low, well-remembered voice beside her, and then, almost without knowing it, found herself standing on the bank of the river, which flowed just below the Longstone grounds, with her old lover at her side.

How often, months ago, she had pictured this meeting, and how differently! The bitter irony of it all struck her sharply.

There was no conventional greeting between them. For a few moments neither spoke. Eileen could not, her heart was too full, and Leighton did not, because he believed that sometimes silence is golden, and, truth to tell, he was somewhat startled and disconcerted by this totally unexpected meeting. He determined to make a bold move:

"Lena," he whispered reproachfully, "why did you do this?"

She grew white to the lips as he took her hands in his own.

"I thought you must be dead," she faltered. "I had no news of you for nearly two years, and all my letters were unanswered. Why, oh, why did you not come or write to me?"

"Child, I never received your letters!" he exclaimed, lying glibly, with his bold eyes searching her upturned face. "Just before your father's death my regiment was ordered abroad, and when next I wrote to you my letter came back to me through the dead letter office."

"I cannot understand it," she cried wearily. "I only know that you have come—too late."

"You should have trusted me, Lena; trusted me and waited," he whispered, his dark head bent low.

"And did I not wait? Ah!"—with a ring of passionate pain in her voice—"I waited, waited, till I grew heartsick and weary, and then, and then——" she paused.

"Yes?" he queried. "Then?"

"A good man offered me his love, and—I took it, God forgive me, though I had none to give in return."

Her voice grew very low, and the red blood rushed to her face in a sudden, shamed flood.

The man's lips curved into a smile, beneath the heavy moustache, which was not pleasant to look upon.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself. "She is prettier than ever. Poor little girl, I was very fond of her once; but of course, after her loss of fortune, I should have been absurd had I given her another thought; but she cares for me still, that is very evident, and a little flirtation, just *pour passer le temps* while I am down here, will be amusing."

Taking her hand he drew it through his arm as they walked along the soft turf.

"Lena," he said gently—"forgive me; but the dear old name comes so naturally—must I go away? I will leave this place to-morrow if you wish it."

"Why should you go?" she answered. "We may at least be friends, surely."

Her heart throbbed passionately. Was she to find him only to lose him again immediately? That would be too cruel, she thought.

He raised her hands to his lips, tenderly, lingeringly; then, turning away, left her alone.

"Dear heart, you are looking tired." It was her husband's tender voice, and he came to her side as, a little later, she stood alone, apart from her guests. "Let me take you to get a glass of wine."

She shook her head.

"No wine, thank you ; but I should like a cup of tea."

"A woman's unfailing panacea for all ills," he said smiling, "Come then, my little white lily, and sip your nectar."

"How ill Mrs. Grahame looks," remarked Evelyn Temple to her brother, as the slight figure passed them leaning on her husband's arm.

"Yes, she does look a trifle seedy. Perhaps it's that gown makes her look so. I don't like such pale, colourless things myself. Now, *you* look really jolly, Eve."

Evelyn laughed and blushed ; the rough brotherly praise pleased her.

"I'm glad I meet with your approval," she said gaily.

The soft creamy muslin she wore was certainly very becoming, and the vivid clusters of scarlet poppies which relieved it suited her pretty gipsy face to perfection.

Eileen was thankful when the day was over and she was free to go to her own room. Her pallor had all vanished now, a bright crimson spot burned upon each cheek, and her blue eyes were dark and brilliant. She had seen him again, her lover, her beloved. Had heard his voice, clasped his hand. The future ? Ah ! She would not think of that. The sweet, dangerously deadly sweet present was enough for her. She would live in it alone. It was long before she slept. The past years with their manifold memories were lived again.

Once more she was a bright, light-hearted girl, singing in her father's garden, sitting under the blossom-laden trees, dreaming the exquisite bliss of youth's first love.

Once again she felt her lover's strong young arms around her, his burning kisses on her lips, her brow. And when at length the dawn was breaking, her last waking thoughts were of him, and it was with his name upon her lips that she fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE days slipped away now all too quickly for Eileen.

She was living in a fool's paradise, and, day by day, as Jack Leighton came and went, the old fascination seemed again to take possession of her.

It was for his smiles she was living, upon his looks and words she fed with ravenous heart-hunger, as pitiful as it was sinful.

But that her passion was an unholy thing, something to be uprooted with steady, remorseless hand, never once entered her mind. She loved him, that was all she thought of.

Daily she prayed, "Lead us not into temptation," and yet, madly, blindly sought and courted that from which she asked to be delivered. How often this is the case: deliberately and wilfully we tread in forbidden paths and run into temptation, and then wait with folded hands, expecting a miracle to be worked for and in us, praying to be delivered from evil, and yet never thinking of so much as lifting a finger to help ourselves.

The Lowescroft garden party was a pronounced success, and the much-talked of picnic was looked forward to with unmixed pleasure by all the house-party.

After considerable thought, it was decided to visit some picturesque and interesting monastic ruins which were situated about a dozen miles away, and so, one sunny morning in September, a merry party set out, with the prospect of a long, happy day before them.

Eileen's pulses beat quickly as she recognized a familiar broad-shouldered, tweed-clad figure, and a sudden pang shot through her heart—was it, could it be *jealousy*?—as she saw the proud, handsome head bending over pretty, brown-haired Evelyn Temple, whispering something which brought a pleased, flushed smile to the girl's face as she listened.

Presently he looked up and saw Eileen's eyes fixed upon him with a look of pain in their clear depths. As soon as he decently could he joined her, and together they wandered away, apart from the rest.

They said but little. For Eileen it was happiness enough to be with him. She did not want to talk

"What an interesting old place this is," Leighton remarked

after a pause. "See, just beyond that wall is the old monks' burial ground."

"Oh," Eileen cried, "can we go nearer? I should so much like to see it. Old places of this kind have a very great charm for me."

"I daresay we can manage it," her companion returned, "if you don't mind a little climbing. I will go first and show you where to put your feet."

They lingered for some time in the quaint old grounds, where the weeds grew thickly round the time-worn, moss-grown headstones, and the waving poppies nodded their scarlet heads in the soft breeze.

"The old fellows should sleep well in this quiet spot; it is a peaceful resting place," Leighton observed presently.

"A garden of sleep," Eileen murmured dreamily. "I like that name, it sounds soothing and restful. Graveyard seems so ghostly and gruesome, and cemetery sounds harsh and cold."

Leighton smiled down upon her as she rested upon a fallen tree.

"What a fanciful child you are. After all, what's in a name?"

"*Everything* sometimes," she returned with sudden bitterness, adding, half to herself, "it all depends upon *what* the name is."

She rose abruptly. "It is time we were going back now, I think," and she turned her face away from his searching eyes, for her own had filled with a rush of swift unbidden tears.

"Not yet," he pleaded. "Do you grudge me these few moments of happiness?"

His tones were dangerously low and tender. She dare not trust herself to reply, but stood silently plucking the petals one by one off a cluster of tall red poppies.

"Lena!"—Ah! how the low, seductive voice made her thrill and tremble—"Lena, darling, give me just a word to live upon through all the long, lonely years before me. Dearest, let me once more hear you say you love me."

He waited, but no answer came. The flirtation which he had commenced so idly was proving to be more serious than he had either imagined or intended, and he was now himself decidedly "hard hit," as he termed it.

He hated to be thwarted in anything, and it piqued and

annoyed him to think that this lovely, dainty girl was lost to him.

He bent lower, lower, till his breath fanned her cheek.

"Lena, look at me." The soft voice which, in time gone by, she had ever been wont to obey, sounded in her ear. Mechanically she raised her misty blue eyes to meet the dark ones above her, and in their depths he read the answer her lips refused to give.

When they rejoined the others Eileen was flushed and trembling, with a strange wild joy in her heart.

"Leighton," Hal Temple's clear young voice rang out, "Leighton, will you give us a song? Here, Mill, hand him that guitar. Now, no excuses, there's a good old fellow."

Leighton took the instrument and struck a few chords lightly. He had a rich, sympathetic voice, and his song was immediately followed by eager requests for another and yet another.

"I will sing just one more," he said at length, "an old favourite of my own." Then, with his eyes upon Eileen, he commenced, "When other lips," the words ringing out with a passionate intensity of feeling which almost startled his hearers: "then you'll remember, you'll remember me."

The full rich tones, now soft and low, and tender as a caress, died away almost as if loth to cease, and for an instant no one spoke, a spell seemed to be upon them.

Mrs. Temple was the first to break it.

"Thank you, Captain Leighton," she said; "you have given us a very great treat."

"Indeed you have," chimed in Milly. "We did not know that you added music to your other accomplishments, or we should not have allowed you to be silent so long."

"I seldom sing now," Leighton returned with a scarcely perceptible emphasis upon the last word, flashing a swift glance to where Eileen was sitting, with Evelyn Temple stretched upon the grass at her feet.

"If you young people want to be in good form for tripping it on the light fantastic toe to-night I think it is time we thought of home," Mr. Temple remarked in his loud, hearty tones. And so a general move was speedily made.

"Eileen, my dearest," said her husband, as he came to her side during the evening, when she was resting flushed and panting in

a little curtained alcove, "I am fearful lest you tire yourself. Promise me you will not dance again."

"I am not in the least tired, thank you, and"—wilfully—"I shall certainly dance again."

"Sit this dance out with me then, dear ; it is not much I ask and the rest will do you good."

"I cannot," she returned coldly ; "it is already promised."

"To whom ?" her husband questioned, taking the big feather fan which she was slowly furling and unfurling from her hand and gently fanning her hot face.

"To Captain Leighton," she answered, striving to speak lightly though her heart beat fast, "and here he comes to claim it."

Rupert Grahame watched the two whirling round together in the mazy dance, then turned away with a sinking heart.

Later in the evening, after leaving the ball-room, Eileen remembered that she had left her fan behind, and returning for it her attention was arrested by hearing her own name. She waited an instant, not liking to come forward and yet not wishing to be a listener to what was evidently not intended for her ears.

"I say, Leighton, you seem rather sweet on pretty Mrs. Grahame."

It was Hal Temple who spoke.

His companion laughed. "Between ourselves, old man," he returned, "the little lady is rather sweet upon *me*. I knew her years ago, and—but this is strictly *sub rosa*—at one time she stood a very good chance of becoming Mrs. Leighton, but her father, poor sinner, lost every penny of his money and died absolutely a beggar, so, as I could not afford to marry a dowerless maiden, I was compelled to quietly drop the fair Eileen."

"Rough, wasn't it ?"

"Very. Come outside and have a smoke, will you ?"

They moved away, leaving Eileen clutching the heavy silken draperies which hid her from view, and white as one who has received a deadly blow.

The delicate fan snapped in her hand as her fingers tightened upon it. She felt sick and faint. Then a sudden feeling of shame swept over her and the hot colour flooded her white drawn face.

Oh, the horror and the shame of it all! She shuddered and hid her despairing face in her hands.

The drive home was a silent one. Eileen lay back in her corner of the carriage with closed eyes.

Her husband was full of tender solicitude, and his quiet attentions and chivalrous courtesy were a sharp contrast to the careless flippant words to which she had been an unintentional listener so short a time before.

The following afternoon, when Captain Leighton called at Longstone, he was a little surprised at not being received by Eileen, who certainly expected his visit.

"My mistress is not at home, sir, but she desired me to give you this when you called," and the trim maid handed him a dainty white and gold missive. The sweet, subtle perfume which greeted him as he tore it open seemed to bring Eileen before him; he could almost hear the rustle of her gown and feel the clasp of her small soft hand.

He was in quite a sentimental mood, and smiled complacently as he opened it, expecting to read some little tender message of regret: instead these hasty lines met his gaze: "I accidentally overheard your remarks to Lieut. Temple last night concerning a certain 'dowerless maiden.' I never wish to see your face again. Thank God, the scales have fallen from my eyes, and though I despise myself, I have still enough self-respect left to say that I hate you." It was signed, "Eileen Grahame," and then was added, as if an afterthought: "My husband knows all."

"Phew! What a fool I've been," he muttered. "Well, I've got my *congé* now, and no mistake. Think I can't do better than clear out of this place as soon as possible. The elderly husband may turn nasty and make things unpleasant, and"—languidly—"I hate a row."

Rupert Grahame was very tender with his young wife when, with white lips and dry, burning eyes, she told him her pitiful little story.

"Blame you, dearest heart? No, 'tis I alone who am to blame," he said. "I should have remembered the old saying about May and December, and not have asked you to give your young life to one old enough to be your father. But I loved you so, my child; I loved you so."

CHRIS.

A few months later, when occasion arose for him to go abroad on some important business which demanded his immediate personal attention, Grahame hailed the opportunity eagerly, thinking and believing that Eileen would be glad to be alone for a time, as he often grew fearful lest his presence might in time come to be irksome to her, and this, he felt, would be more than he could endure.

Eileen was very silent when he told her of his decision, but, when the day of his departure arrived, and Grahame held her to him in tender farewell, she broke down and sobbed passionately in his arms.

Even then had she bid him stay he would have done so, at whatever cost, and he listened eagerly for some such word, but none came, and with a last long kiss and a low, "God bless and keep my darling always," he was gone.

The house seemed very dull and empty without his kindly face and cheery voice, and after a week or two, Eileen grew desperately lonely, and began to long heartily for her husband's return.

She became very pale and languid, and took so little interest in life that kind-hearted Phoebe grew quite alarmed, and even went so far as to utter a gentle remonstrance.

"Don't bother me, Phoebe," her mistress replied petulantly; "I am tired—tired to death."

Then there came a day when the heavy eyelids could scarcely open and the weary head could not be lifted from the pillow.

Phoebe sent hurriedly for motherly little Mrs. Ryde, and, before another day had dawned, a little downy head lay pillowed on Eileen's breast, and a pair of blue eyes, wondrously like her own, looked up at her with a world of wondering mystery in their clear limpid depths.

The young mother's strength came back very slowly.

"She seems to have no hold upon life," the doctor remarked one day to Mrs. Ryde. "I do not like this lethargy; you must try to rouse her."

The little one was restless that evening, and, dismissing the nurse, Mrs. Ryde undertook to look after the invalid for an hour or two.

As soon as they were alone Eileen turned to her.

"When is Rupert coming home?" she asked abruptly.

"As soon as his business is satisfactorily settled, I should imagine," Mrs. Ryde returned; "he will have a double reason now to hasten his return, will he not, baby?" pressing her lips to the tiny silken head which nestled in her arms.

"Esther, listen to me," Eileen's voice rang out sharply. "I don't believe he *wants* to come back. He thinks I don't care for him, and so he has left me; but oh, it is more than I can bear, for"—very low—"I love him *now* dearly, dearly. Esther, if he does not come back to me soon I think I shall die."

Her voice was weak and faint and her hands, grown so thin and fragile, were tightly clasped together.

Esther Ryde turned to her and the tears stood in her kindly eyes.

"My darling child," she said tenderly, "I did not guess you wanted him so badly. I will send for him as soon as I possibly can."

"How good you are to me, dear," Eileen murmured gratefully; then, shyly, "Shall I—would he like—may I write a message?"

"To be sure you may, my dear," Mrs. Ryde returned heartily; "a line from you will bring him home quickly enough, I'll be bound. Well, what is it now?" as Eileen still looked wistfully at her.

She laughed and flushed faintly.

"Don't think me very silly," she said, "but do you think I might send him a lock of baby's hair?"

"The young man certainly hasn't a superabundance of it at present," Mrs. Ryde returned, with a little comical smile. "However, I daresay he can manage to spare just a wee lock for 'father.' Eh, little sonnie?" with a loving kiss as she laid the tiny bundle of muslin and lace beside his mother, who was lying back flushed and happy.

A very sweet message it was that went speeding over the sea, and which brought sudden joy and unspeakable gladness to the lonely, far-off husband.

"Dearest," it said, "come home; I cannot live without you, and I long to show baby his father."

MARIAN FINDLAY.

The Curse of the Child.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

HOW IT WAS GIVEN.

IT seems a strange thing to begin the happiest years of one's life, under the shadow, and in the very midst of the fulfilment of a curse.

In these enlightened days, it appears heathenish, not to say altogether impossible, to believe that such a thing as a doom, or a warning, or a fate, prophesied in the dark ages hundreds of years ago, can possibly exert the slightest influence over the lives of sensible people ; I, for one, had always laughed at such superstitions with a healthy incredulity. But I was destined to learn that over some minds even yet, omens and forecasts have as much power now as ever they had, and that to believe a thing *is*, amounts practically to creating it !

It was on a bright spring evening that I first came face to face with a problem entirely new in my experience. I was staying with my grandparents in Somersetshire. The village of which my grandfather was rector lay at the foot of a long hill, gently sloping up towards a belt of fir-trees ; and I was very fond of climbing to the top of this hill to enjoy the beautiful sunsets visible from the heights. On one of these occasions, just as I had reached my favourite perch, a stile at the side of the road-way, half hidden with the trailing branches of honeysuckle and wild rose in their first bravery of green, a smart dog-cart passed me, going at a good pace down the hill. A young man (handsome of course !) was driving, and a pale pretty girl was by his side. In my brief glimpse of her I could not fail to be struck by the intense sadness of her expression ; her dark eyes seemed to be looking before her almost as if she saw something that appalled her in the distance ; and yet she was answering cheerfully enough some remark her companion had just made. A groom sat behind, and I recognized that he wore the Barrie livery. I had stayed often enough at the Rectory to know that the Barries were the great people of the neighbourhood ; but I knew also that they lived much abroad, and that Barries' Court was generally in the hands of a few servants.

Old Mr. Barrie had died lately, his wife having pre-deceased him many years, and the family consisted but of one son and two daughters. Girl-like, the moment I saw them, I began to speculate as to whether they had come to live at home now for any length of time, and if so, whether I should be likely to make their acquaintance. Why did that girl look so terribly sad and frightened? Was her brother unkind to her? But no, he seemed far too prepossessing to be anything but "nice;" and with this very school-girlish approbation uppermost in my mind, I did a correspondingly school-girlish action, and climbed to the top bar of the stile to watch their further progress down the hill. What a fine broad-shouldered man he was, and what a trim figure and daintily-poised head she had! Ah, what had happened? At the first instant I thought that sudden giddiness was overtaking me, or that an earthquake wave was passing under the hill-side, and then I realized that the chestnut, with its coat of satin, and its beautiful action, and its perfectly-appointed harness, had ignominiously stumbled and gone down: that, in fact, there was a complete smash, and I was the only one available to render assistance!

I suppose I ran; I know that in another instant I was in the middle of the group, panting and terrified, but gasping out, "Sit on his head; sit on his head!" in a manner which made the grave groom smile in spite of his consternation.

"I'll mind the 'orse, miss, if you'll go to the young lady," he said; "don't you be afraid of the 'orse, 'e won't do nothing. But for the Lord's sake see to Miss Barrie, for I believe she's fainted!" I looked about me hastily.

Mr. Barrie was leaning breathless against the hedge, wiping some blood from his face; and in an opposite direction, on the hard road, lay his sister with eyes wide open, looking, it seemed to me, straight up into the very depths of the sky.

As I bent over her, she spoke a few words faintly, but I could not understand her meaning.

"The curse, Christopher; it is the curse; I knew it would come!"

Her words and manner terrified me.

"Are you much hurt?" I ventured, feeling that it was a feeble question, and yet not knowing what to say.

"Let me help you to sit up. It is all right; nobody is killed; don't be frightened."

For as I raised her she looked at me with such piteous terror in her face that I began to fear for her reason.

"Theo, dearest, are any bones broken? Tell me what you feel. See, I am quite right, and Jervis jumped off without a scratch. Stand up, my darling, and let's see at least that you are whole and sound."

Mr. Barrie came behind her, so that she should not remark the gash upon his head; and with his aid and mine, she struggled to rise, but the effort evidently caused her intense pain.

"Let me lie down again," she moaned, and then under her breath, once more I heard her say, "The curse, the curse; it has come at last!" Next moment she lay unconscious, and as one dead, in my arms.

"We must get help at once," said Mr. Barrie. "The Vernons at the Rectory, I am sure they would do anything."

"I am certain they would," I cried eagerly. "Mr. Vernon is my grandfather. Let me run at once and tell them. The gardener shall come, and he and your groom can carry her down easily."

It did not take long to arrange matters.

In less than a quarter-of-an-hour I found myself, with my grandmother, in a cab from the village inn, supporting as best we could the senseless form of poor Miss Barrie; and making a slow progress through the twilight towards her home. Our gardener had been dispatched for the doctor; the groom was attending to the chestnut's injuries, which were not very serious, in our stable; and Mr. Barrie, on grandfather's fat pony, was riding on in advance to get things ready at Barries' Court. We had tried to persuade them to remain at the Rectory; and I think grandmamma was glad, while I was sorry at the refusal. Young people like excitement, even though it be of a tragic kind; but the accommodation under the modest Rectory gables would certainly have been limited, and our style of living not of the sort to which the Barries of Barries' Court were accustomed. The girl looked very beautiful in her unconsciousness, but painfully fragile too. Grandmamma shook her head silently as she bent over her.

"What did she mean about the curse?" I whispered once, with those strange words repeating themselves persistently in my head. "Do you know, Granny?"

The only answer was a portentous "Hush," and a solemn forefinger uplifted in warning.

We had just jolted over a stone, and a slight contraction in Miss Barrie's white forehead showed that she was not altogether insensible to outside influences.

I relapsed into silence, wondering ; and so we came in between the great stone gate posts, and under an avenue of elms, where rooks were settling themselves in and about their nests, which showed like ragged black spots against a cold primrose-tinted sky.

Mr. Barrie was on the door-step, with his youngest sister beside him. Behind was a crowd of servants, and the doctor came up just as we reached the portico. There was some natural commotion, a subdued expression of grief and pity ; and then they all melted away as it were towards the great staircase, and I was left alone in the wide hall, where the shadows gathered thickly among coats of mail, and costly china, and foreign monstrosities of all sorts, which were displayed in picturesque confusion on every side.

Grandmamma had dismissed the cab, saying that we would walk home later ; she had followed the sad procession up to Miss Barrie's room, but I felt that I was not wanted there, and so I sat forlornly in the hall, feeling not a little strange and uncomfortable. Again, as the old housekeeper saw her mistress carried in, had I caught a whisper of those mysterious words : "The curse, it is the curse at last !" and a thrill of superstitious fear ran through me. It was quite a comfort, when one of the big dogs, that had been wandering, evidently ill at ease, outside on the gravel, came in, and up to me, to lay his warm brown head upon my lap. I was fondling his ears gratefully, and wishing with all my heart that some one with the power of speech would arrive, to break the long-continued silence, when I heard the sound of quick footsteps, and perceived that the younger Miss Barrie was coming down the wide oak staircase. As I recognized her white dress by the pale light still entering at the open door I rose impulsively.

"Oh, how is your sister now ? I do hope she is better ? What does the doctor say ?"

I always had a way of asking several questions at once, and perhaps I may have startled Miss Barrie by my suddenness.

She drew in her breath sharply, and clasped her hands for an instant, with a gesture that was almost despairing, before she replied :

"We cannot tell yet. Dr. Armstrong fears the spine is hurt. They have sent me out of the room. It is strange, when one's dearest are *in extremis*, strangers may be with them and we are shut out!" She gave a sort of little laugh, but there was no mirth in it. "You are Miss Vernon?" she went on questioningly. "Then why are you left here in the dark and cold! Please forgive our neglect. Come this way." She led me across the hall into a pretty morning-room, where a cheerful fire was burning in the grate. Instinctively we both approached it, not that we were cold, but the sense of its comfort and warmth was very pleasant just then. She put me into a deep low chair and sank down upon the hearth-rug. There was a sort of hopeless calm about her which surprised me; she was evidently very young, and the terrible accident which threatened her only sister's life would naturally, I thought, have greatly unnerved her. At least, I knew that if any of my beloved ones had been involved in such a catastrophe I could not sit silently, as she did, for the next few minutes, gazing into the glowing coals without a sign of tears in her large blue eyes. Her silence urged me to speak, and I began with an apology for my presence.

"My grandmother sent away the cab; I am waiting to walk home with her. I wonder if she will be long?"

Miss Barrie had seemingly forgotten my presence for the moment, and she turned to me with a somewhat bewildered air.

"Your grandmother? Oh, yes, of course. Mrs. Vernon, the old lady with the white hair. Do you want her? Don't take her away just yet; Theo has tight hold of her hand, and we could not separate them. I fancy Theo thinks that she is her own dear grandmother, who died years ago. She had snowy curls just like that. I am sure she will stay if it is the least comfort to Theo, won't she?"

She spoke pleadingly, and I hastened to assure her that I would not urge our departure for the world.

"Christopher has telegraphed for Sir Edward Lancing, but it is useless," the girl continued, letting her eyes stray back once more to the fire. "Theo and I were quite prepared for this; and Christopher was, too, in spite of himself; but he will not

allow that he believes things of this sort. She will be twenty-one on Wednesday in next week !”

It flashed across my mind that the youngest Miss Barrie was a little off her head, so unintelligible was this speech to me : perhaps the shock had been too much for her. I felt more and more uncomfortable, but thought it wisest to keep up some sort of conversation.

“ You are several years younger ? ” I hazarded, noting how the firelight played on her silky fair hair and the childish beauty of her complexion. “ I should guess you to be about seventeen ? ”

“ I am past eighteen,” she answered ; “ there are hardly three years between us.”

“ But your sister looks older than one-and-twenty, doesn't she ? I only saw her face for a minute before—before it all happened, but I saw that she seemed very pale and sad.”

“ How can she help it ? ” cried the girl, flushing up into more animation than I had perceived her to show yet.

“ It is a terrible thing to look at death so close when you are young, and well, and strong !. And Theo has so much to make life happy, so much, so much—and she dreads dying horribly ! ”

“ But she is not going to die,” I said, trying to speak cheerfully, for Miss Barrie had hidden her face in her hands. “ I can't think why you should despair all at once. People get over much worse accidents than hers every day. I daresay by the time her birthday comes she will be——” “ Almost well,” I intended saying, but Miss Barrie interrupted me.

“ By the time her birthday comes—she will be *dead*,” she said, in a low earnest tone that carried conviction in it and made me thrill with a nameless dread.

“ Have you never heard of the Barries' curse, the curse of the child ? Ah, you don't live here, and your grandfather, I daresay, does not believe in such things, though clergymen used to in the old days.” She paused, thinking deeply, but my curiosity was now fully awakened.

“ I know nothing ; do tell me ! What is the curse and what has it to do with you ? ” I asked eagerly.

Somehow I felt as if our modern surroundings were altogether out of place, and that we should be sitting in a “ baronial hall,” with rushes for our carpet, and mysterious whisperings of the wind behind the arras as an accompaniment to the speaker's voice.

"It happened somewhere in the fifteenth century," she said, half under her breath, while I bent forward to listen. "There were Barries, of Barries' Court, even then, and there was a beautiful Elinor Barrie once, who lived here. Not in this very house, of course, but in one which stood just on the same spot; and on her twenty-first birthday, this Elinor Barrie was riding out at the great gates with her friends, talking and laughing, when she saw a beggar-woman waiting in the road with a child. The woman held up the child to beg, and it put its little hands upon Elinor's skirt and prayed for food. But the horse was startled, and reared; and Elinor, who was always, they say, very proud and passionate, struck the child with her whip, and bade them both be off out of the way for insolent ne'er-do-weels. And then the woman held the baby's hands up towards heaven and made it repeat after her the terrible words of the curse. It was a tiny little creature of between two and three years old, so thin and small, it looked as if the wind would blow it away, but it could speak plainly. I cannot tell you the words, they are too awful, but she cursed the Barries, root and branch, and she said that no woman of their race should ever live to twenty-one, and none of them should ever have a child to call her mother. And every word that she said the little child repeated, holding up its hands to the sky. They say that Elinor rode away laughing, and her friends with her; but on her way back, as they were crossing a ford, her horse stepped in a hole, and he and his rider were drowned; and as they carried home the Lady Elinor, there at the gate lay the beggar-woman and the child dead, too, dead of starvation and misery!"

"What a terrible old legend," I said, with a shiver. "I wonder how much truth there is in it."

"This much," said Miss Barrie, turning round and facing me with almost unearthly-looking eyes. "This much—that what the child said has been fulfilled, every word of it. No daughter of the Barries' house ever lived to be more than one-and-twenty. Some of them thought lightly of the curse; they were married early, they even had children, but before the babies learned to speak, the mothers always died; some of accidents, some of illnesses, some of a kind of wasting. Oh! it is all true, horribly, cruelly true, and now Theo's fate has come; and within three years—mine must come too!"

"Oh, I can't, I won't believe it," I cried impulsively, seizing her hand. "Such things are not allowed. Why should generations of women suffer because one was proud and passionate? You do away with the goodness of God when you believe in such cruelty as that."

"Christopher says the same," said Miss Barrie, with a wan little attempt at a smile. "Every one says the same who is not of the Barrie women-kind. And with each one that dies, people say, 'She is the last, and the curse is all nonsense. It was a fever or an accident that might happen to anybody,' and they tell us not to think of it. As if thinking made any difference!"

"People do frighten themselves to death, though, sometimes," I said. "Grandmamma had a cook once——"

Miss Barrie gave a slight movement of impatience, and then continued, almost to herself: "I talked with an old, old woman who lived in the alms-house, down in the village. She was past ninety, and the neighbours told all sorts of strange stories about her power of second-sight, and her charms for curing diseases. She had heard of the curse from her mother and her grandmother; some of her people had always been in the Barrie service, and they knew all the tradition. 'My dear,' she used to say, and she would lay her old shrivelled fingers upon mine and draw me close to whisper in my ear, 'My dear, the same power that brought the sorrow can lift it away. With a child's hand was the curse given, and only a child's hand shall take it back again.' I never knew what she meant, I was only a child myself then, and I could not get her to answer my questions coherently. She died one year when we were abroad, long ago now."

"It seems a heathenish idea," I said musingly. "Did your mother believe in it too?"

"She struggled against the belief," said Miss Barrie "and very, very seldom would she talk of it. Indeed, she meant to have kept it from us altogether, only Theo found the story mentioned in some family records, and asked her all about it. Then she said that life and death were in God's hands, and not in the power of human words, and she told us that she had named Theo as she did, to remind herself continually of that. So that if it pleased Him to take her away first, mother might be able to say 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

"And you, what are you called?" I asked.

"Dear mother, she could not hide from herself that there was some sort of danger hanging over us, though she would not let us talk of it, and she called me Hope. But names are not much use. What is the good of hoping, when one sees the inevitable end?"

I knew not what to answer her. I grew cold in the warm blaze, thinking of the dead and gone girls who had met their different ends so early. Was there no escape for these, either? A slight bustle in the hall disturbed us, and Mr. Barrie entered, with a telegram in his hand.

"Sir Edwin will be here by the first train in the morning, Hope," he said, scarcely noticing my presence. "Will you give orders to have a room ready and some breakfast? I will send the brougham to the station. His train comes in at 5.20"

"How is Theo now?" asked Hope, glancing up at the clock, which pointed towards ten.

"Still unconscious," said her brother. "By the way, that kind old lady, Mrs. Vernon, has offered to stay the night here, and she wants her granddaughter to go home and tell the rector. You are Miss Vernon, I suppose?" turning suddenly upon me.

"Yes," I answered, a little shyly. I had been studying him furtively, in the firelight, and thinking how handsome and interesting he looked, with a handkerchief bound across his manly brow!

"I think I ought to be starting at once, in that case, for grand-papa is all alone and will want me."

"I wish you could stay," said Miss Barrie wistfully. (We had grown suddenly friendly on that sad evening.) "But of course the rector must not be neglected. Shall I order the carriage?"

"Or will you walk?" interposed her brother. "It is a lovely night, and if you will allow me I will escort you home."

I murmured something about not liking to trouble him, but he did not heed me, and indeed it was far pleasanter to look forward to a walk home in his company than to a solitary drive in a close carriage.

Miss Barrie kissed me and pressed my hand closely as we parted. I tried to say a few hopeful words, but somehow her forebodings had infected me, and my eyes were full of sympathetic tears as we came out into the starlit darkness.

Mr. Barrie did not talk much, and I respected his silence. Now and then he unconsciously quickened his pace, and I had

almost to run to keep up with him ; and then he would suddenly remember me and pause, with a laugh and an apology.

"I am afraid you think me a mad sort of escort, Miss Vernon," he said once ; "but you must please excuse me. One does not get a crack on the head every day, you know. And then I keep going on over and over again the details of the afternoon to see if in any way it was my fault. Do *you* think it was ?" he added earnestly. "You were the only eye-witness. Was I driving too fast or too carelessly ?"

I assured him that to the best of my knowledge he was not in the least to blame.

"No one could have prevented the horse's slipping on that loose stone," I said. "I am sure you ought not to distress yourself."

"If only it had not occurred just now," he said. "And I was taking such care for Theo, trying to keep her in my sight every minute of the day, lest something should happen. Perhaps you do not know the foolish story of the curse, though ?" he added, trying to speak lightly, but betraying in his tone more than he thought.

"Yes ; your sister told me. I cannot think such things could be true," I answered hesitatingly, "and yet she seems to believe it all."

"And so does Theo," he replied ; "believes it so implicitly, poor child, that she will die to fulfil the prophecy. I mean that it has worked so much upon her nerves that she has no longer any hope of living ; and you know, when people lose hope, it is generally all up with them. It will be strange, strange, if she dies too."

He was silent once more, and I walked gravely by his side, feeling as if I had suddenly stepped into a new and unreal world, where all my ideas of life and destiny were being turned "topsy-turvy." I wondered what grandpapa, quietly writing his sermon in the study, would have to say to this strange Fate, which seemed to be the deity of the Barrie generations.

The young man would not come in when we reached the Rectory gate. He bade me a hearty good-bye, thanking me for all I had done, in a way I certainly scarcely deserved, and promising to send over early next morning with news of the patient and of my grandmother. And then he went away, and I watched him disappear under the trees, and thought, in a romantic school-

girl fashion, what a very pleasant thing it would be to have a lover as handsome and as interesting as Mr. Barrie of Barries' Court.

Grandmamma walked in herself at about eleven o'clock next day. I was in the garden gathering flowers, and ran to meet her, dropping my heavy-headed daffodils as I went.

"Oh, Granny, how is Miss Barrie? You are looking quite tired out. Have you had a bad night?"

Grandmamma did not pull me up for asking two questions in one breath, as she might have done at another time. She took my arm and leant on it a little heavily as we went up the path.

"Yes, it was rather a trying night," she said. "The poor child suffered terribly, and when she had been given an opiate I hardly think the pain was less. She moaned and started and cried out all the time."

"Did she talk of the curse?" I asked eagerly,

"Yes," answered Granny. "Poor, superstitious girl, that seemed to be the one idea in her head. Oh, if she had been my daughter, I would have strained every nerve to keep her in ignorance of the tradition. The doctors say that the thought of her supposed doom has wrought upon her so that if she should recover it may be with the loss of her reason. It is too sad, too dreadful."

Granny was trembling as she spoke, and even to me the sunshine and the blue sky, and the scent of the primroses, seemed but a mockery—a dreary parade of brightness, in the face of a catastrophe like that.

Seeing us approaching, grandpapa came out into the hall to meet us, and we established Granny in a comfortable arm-chair to rest, while I went off with her keys to do the necessary household duties in her stead. She had promised, she told us, to return to Barries' Court for the night. There seemed to be no female relatives in the family (another proof, I thought, of the working of the curse), and poor Hope had begged her to come back. Theodora appeared easier when Granny was near, and the frightened women-servants were only too glad to have a responsible person in the house. Of course a trained nurse had been sent for, so that my grandmother would not be overtaxed, and she gladly acceded to Hope's request.

The doctors assured her that the danger could not last long. In one way or the other a change must take place very

shortly. They could not tell yet how things were likely to go, but seemed very grave.

"Wednesday will be her twenty-first birthday," I said, half under my breath, and grandpapa looked at me quite sternly, for him, and told me not to be foolish. But nevertheless I found myself getting more and more excited as the fateful day drew nearer. I went up once to take a letter to Granny, who, after the first, almost lived at the great house, and I saw both Miss Hope and her brother. They made me come in and have a chat, but they were evidently frightfully anxious and absent-minded, I could see, and I would not stay long, as I perceived what an effort it was for them to make small talk.

Mr. Barrie insisted on escorting me home, for which I was half sorry, as I could not imagine what to talk about; but he seemed satisfied with very little, and when we came to the Rectory gate he grasped my hand and said, "I thank you," quite fervently.

"Thank you for what?" said I, smiling up at him. He seemed slightly embarrassed.

"For letting me be silent, I think," he answered, after a second. "This walk has done me no end of good."

And then he turned shy and strode away so quickly that I feared my smile had vexed him. All Tuesday I heard nothing from Barries' Court, and I was afraid to venture there to inquire. Grandpapa called at the lodge, where daily bulletins were posted to prevent unnecessary noise at the house itself, but the report only said, "Miss Barrie just the same."

He and I had a game of chess together after supper, and I was altogether routed, for my thoughts were away with Granny, in that great melancholy mansion, over which, it seemed to me, the darkness of death was hovering like a heavy cloud.

The night was a very still one, and when I went upstairs to bed, I opened my window wide and looked away across the softly swelling hills, to where the woods of Barries' Court showed, a black mass, against the pale sky.

There was scarcely a breath of wind to stir the tulips down in the garden, or the young frail leaves of the clematis which twined about the porch. I could not make up my mind to sleep yet, and I knelt on the low window seat, with my hands clasped, in a sort of voiceless prayer. Might not this life be spared and the fateful spell of the long past years removed? If it had been

possible, I would almost have wished to change places with Miss Barrie, to suffer instead of her, and so prove the futility of the old legend. I had grown strangely interested in the whole family since last week, and I dreaded what effect upon Miss Hope any tragic ending to the story might have. I do not know how long I knelt there, but suddenly there was the sharp ring of hoofs and the thunder of a galloping horse.

Something flashed past the gate. In the dimness of the suffused moonlight I could perceive a man in livery, for I caught sight of bright buttons as he went. He was riding as if for dear life in the direction of the nearest town. I sank down trembling upon the window seat, feeling that the crisis was come. The two local doctors both lived at B——, and I felt sure that none of the Barries' Court horses would be ridden at such a pace unless some one were in dire necessity.

A little later, while I still waited with straining ears and eyes, the brougham with its pair of chestnuts dashed by, sent, as I concluded, to bring the doctors faster than their own steeds might be able to manage. Never before had I sat up all the night, but I knew that I should not sleep if I went to bed; so, wrapping myself in a thick shawl, I knelt and waited by the open window.

It was very weird, and solemn, and awful, with no sound but occasional ghostly whispers among the leaves or the scurry of some small animal across the gravel path. No star looked out to cheer me, the sky was completely overclouded; but the moonlight filtered through, and all the surrounding objects showed dim and vague and enormous in the universal greyness. What a long watch it seemed! I thought it would never end. The church clock had struck two before the distant roll of wheels greeted my ears again.

Nearer and nearer they came, with lights flashing between the hedgerows. Oh! how I longed to rush down and beg to be taken up. I believe I was tempted to "hang on behind" in street urchin fashion, if only I might be transported somehow to the great house, to know what was happening.

But I restrained myself, for another idea had seized me. After the carriage had passed our little white gate, I heard, far off, the sound again of horses' hoofs. I guessed that the groom must be returning, more leisurely, and I determined to waylay him.

Grandpapa was a little deaf and the servants slept at the back of the house. No one was likely to hear me unbolt the front door, and I felt that I must, I must have news. I took my hand-lamp and crept down through the warm, silent house. The bolt was easily slipped; no one feared burglars at the Rectory, and sheltering my light with my hand, I stole softly across the grass, which was much too damp for my thin slippers. But I did not think of that, so fearful was I that the rider might pass before I got to the gate. He could not overlook me if I managed to keep the light burning, and fortunately there was next to no air stirring.

The horse started as it drew near, but was too weary to make much demonstration, and the young groom looked weary too. I knew him well, for he was in grandpapa's Sunday class.

"Oh, Ned, is anything wrong? Have you been for the doctor?"

Ned did not seem in the least surprised to see me at that uncanny hour, with a shawl over my head and my evening dress on.

"'Tis Miss Barrie. I've been for the doctors, and they are to telegraph for the big London one as soon as the office is open. But the housekeeper she says as it's no use, she's goin' fast."

The poor young fellow had a soft heart, and the doom which had been hanging over his mistress's head was frequently discussed by the household. He looked as if he were going to cry, and I felt in like predicament. I tried to elicit further details, but he knew no more. He had only done what he was ordered to do, and Brown Bess had gone like the wind; no one could have got to B— faster than they two had. But he must take her home and look after her now, or she would suffer. So he rode slowly on again, and I went back to my room chilled and disconsolate.

But all the speed of Brown Bess and all the skill in the world had been of no avail.

Grandmamma came home early in the morning, looking utterly worn out and melancholy. My eager questions died upon my lips when I saw her face.

"It is all over, Madeline; she passed away just at midnight, before the doctors came. It was very sudden at the last."

"At midnight!" I repeated, awe-struck, yet not amazed. Then the curse had been fulfilled yet again. Another Miss Barrie had not lived to see the dawn break on her twenty-first birthday!

CHRIS.

PART II.

HOW IT WAS TAKEN AWAY.

TWO years came and went. If events had fallen out as I fully expected them to do, I should have returned to my midland home; the Barries would have deserted the old house, which had been the scene of such a sorrow to them, and our paths in life might never have crossed again. I quite felt that Miss Barrie's death had severed the slender link which bound us for a time together; and it was as much to my astonishment as to any one else's that I found all my ideas utterly overthrown.

I *did* go back to my own people, but only for a little while; the Barries *did* go abroad, but for a very brief sojourn. At the end of two years after that spring evening when we first met, we were at Barries' Court again; and I, plain little Madeline Vernon, the rector's granddaughter, was transformed into Mrs. Barrie, with servants, and carriages, and diamonds; all as very small accessories, in her opinion, to the best husband in the world!

I will not waste your time by describing how this wonder came about; that is not the story I wish to tell: suffice it to say that after our wedding in September, we spent a long honeymoon abroad, and did not come home until the spring blossoms were making the orchards beautiful with sheets of rose-tinged snow.

Hope had been staying with various friends during our absence, but I know she was very glad of our return. She had no home except at Barries' Court; and I was delighted to see how readily she agreed to living with us. I had been terribly anxious as to the way in which she might look at Christopher's marriage. I knew that if any one had stepped in between me and my only brother, I should have felt more or less aggrieved all the days of my life; and I was quite surprised at the calm, nay, even happy light in which Hope saw the event. I was sure she was fond of me; but I could scarcely understand how there seemed no spark of jealousy in her breast; no shadow of discontent at the fact of my reigning where she had so naturally reigned since her sister's death. But as I puzzled over it all, a light dawned over me, and in a flash I understood. She was convinced that she had not long to live; and it was not so hard to leave Christopher now that she felt he would have a wife to look after him. In her eyes, our marriage had taken place just

at the right time—our happiness was a source of satisfaction and peace to her ; and she looked forward almost calmly to the hour of her departure, knowing that her dearly beloved brother would have the consolation which was, in her opinion, for ever denied to herself.

The discovery pained, though it hardly surprised, me. We had been hoping that change of air and scene and the society of pleasant friends were aiding to disperse the cloud of sorrow which had rested upon Hope since her sister's death ; and we had, in planning the new arrangements of the house, included her in every project and consulted her in every detail. But she took little interest in our ideas, and acquiesced almost without comment in all our propositions. I began to get very anxious about her as the spring advanced.

We had arrived at Barries' Court towards the end of April ; and for the first few days Hope looked well, and was even cheerful. She seemed resolved that no personal sorrow should dim the brightness of our married life. But gradually, as it appeared, the shadow of approaching doom quenched the light in her eyes and hushed the laughter into which my husband now and then betrayed her. Her twenty-first birthday would fall on the 19th of June ; the days were slipping rapidly away, and, though I owned my foolishness, yet I had to confess to Christopher that a frantic terror seized me at the thought of it.

"We cannot live here quietly, Chris., waiting for it ! It would be too awful ! I believe it would drive me mad, and the suspense is enough to kill her of itself. We *must* go away somewhere. Oh, if I could get some of the waters of oblivion, that Hope might drink of them and forget that fatal date ! Could we not give her a sleeping draught ? alter all the almanacks and clocks in the house ; do anything to get the day over without her knowledge ? She is fretting herself into a nervous fever over it already !"

"And you are no better," said Christopher with a tremendous sigh. "I don't see what is to be done. We could never trick her about the date, she counts the days too carefully for that, and as to sleeping draughts, I dare not meddle with things of that sort." He looked out of the window hopelessly. "Of course I can take her away," he said after a pause.

"Not her only," I cried eagerly ; "I must go too. I could not

rest if I were left behind alone. Between us we *must* save her. I believe I would give up everything to keep her with us—except you, Christopher."

He looked at me fondly.

"You are not up to travelling," he said; "we came here for peace and quietness for you, after all your journeyings."

"Oh, but peace and quietness are to be found in heaps of other places," I answered. "I can assure you I shall be ill if I stay here by myself, and worse if Hope stays too. We must go away all together, and perhaps something may help us. Hope shall not die without every effort to prevent it. I don't believe in the curse one bit, but she does, and it is that which is killing her."

So after a short consultation, in which, for once, Hope was not included, we settled to go down to Cornwall and take lodgings for a month or two in a romantic nook on that wild and beautiful coast.

I am sure that Hope was surprised at our decision, for we had so lately returned from our wanderings and announced our intention of settling down at Barries' Court; but she acquiesced with a show of alacrity, which, however, did not deceive me in the least. I knew pretty well by this time that all places were alike to Hope now.

The one overmastering thought of her heart permitted her to take no interest in anything beyond itself. We were a dreadful set of hypocrites in those days, for I was pretending a delight which I was far from feeling at the prospect of another move; and Christopher spoke in glowing terms of the splendid walks to which he looked forward, when we both knew that the improvements being carried out on the estate were in such a critical position that it was an absolute sacrifice for him to go and leave them without the master's eye.

However, the middle of May found us, with the journey safely accomplished, a party of four persons, ourselves and a treasure of a maid, established in a tiny house hidden away in a cleft of rock, within a stone's-throw of the sea. The narrow valley was so placed as to be easily overlooked by explorers of the breezy heights above; but at that time of the year the trippers had not begun to "trip," and our solitude was often unbroken, save for the arrival of the postwoman, a neat and active little person,

who came at noon with the letters, and waited half-an-hour to enable us to write any replies that might be requisite. It was an unusually forward season; the summer had suddenly set in, before the spring had fairly played its part, and our little cove was a sort of trap for catching sunbeams. No one who has not visited the Lizard and the adjacent coast can form any idea of the beauties of its sea, and rocks, and sand, and sky. It was in vain that I sketched diligently, while Janet held a sunshade above my head; and Christopher and Hope danced away over the water with a life-boat man to guide them to the caves and the inaccessible haunts of cormorants and gulls. I was such a bad sailor myself that the very sight of their start, from a slippery and perilous rock which was the only sort of pier, brought my heart into my mouth, as Janet expressed it; but the Barries had voyaged so much that nothing seemed to daunt them, and we both hoped that, with the colour which the breezes brought into Hope's cheek, might come a returning confidence in life and its possibilities.

I wonder if she ever forgot the haunting fear! I know I did not, although I stoutly denied the power of the curse. My mind was occupied with it all the time I was struggling with my sketches. They were miserable failures, all of them. I could never reproduce the gorgeous colouring, the tossing, tumbling foam, the pearly mists of morning, or the cool shadows cast by the great serpentine monsters which lay in magnificence on every side. But some one has them still, treasured up, as mementos of a time that can never come again. And that some one is not Christopher.

One by one the days slipped by; sunshine and breeze, and the rush of the waves; moonlight and solemn stars, and the deeper sound of the waters, that seems to rise with darkness, until its awfulness makes one afraid. And all day long, and nearly all the night, the voices of the gulls; joyous in the morning, weird and mysterious out of the twilight, like voices in a dream.

June came; a week, a fortnight passed, and nothing had happened, as I fondly hoped, to turn the current of my sister-in-law's thoughts. Christopher noticed, he told me, that she had begun to dread the boat; and more than once, when it appeared in sight, she had vanished, and he was forced to go out alone.

"She thinks she is going to be drowned," I said, promptly

jumping to a conclusion in a purely feminine way. "She sees danger in everything, and no wonder. Don't persuade her to go with you, Chris. It must be dreadful for her. Let her stay quietly here with Janet and me; it will be far better."

So Christopher professed to be tired of boating, and I was glad for his sake when a friend from town wrote to say that he was in the neighbourhood, and would pay us a visit, if we could put him up. We had taken the whole cottage, except the kitchens, and the owners left us in possession every night, retiring to their farm up on the heights and returning early to do the necessary housework. So there was one cupboard of a bedroom to spare, and none of us were sorry when Dick Madox arrived with his knapsack to occupy it.

I knew him very well by name. He had been a college friend of Christopher's, and was reputed to be a rising artist. Even Hope was roused into enthusiasm over his sketches; while I locked up my portfolio in abject terror, lest he should happen to set eyes upon my efforts. He was a handsome fellow and full of laughter and fun. On the very first evening I made sure that in him lay the solution of our difficulty. He was to fall in love with Hope, and Hope with him; and what girl could be all day long thinking of her own possible demise, with a lover like Dick at her elbow? But he must make haste about it. There was no time for dallying. Even Christopher grew anxious and impatient when his masculine mind had taken in all the bearings of my plan.

I could have laughed at his transparent manœuvres to leave the two together; and I could have cried, too, at Hope's tiresome dulness in preferring my company to that of Dick. Four days, three days, two days, to be tided over, and every morning Hope looked paler and more fragile. She answered absently to what we said; there was a dreamy far-off expression in her eyes, and I noticed, with a thrill of pain, that the terror and despair I had sometimes seen there were gone. In place of them was a calm, almost happy, resignation that angered me.

"I believe, if a calamity overtook her now, she would make no effort to save herself," I said to my husband. "Has she no spirit, Chris? Has the shadow of this horrible curse taken all the life-blood out of her already?"

Chris. sighed and did not answer. Indeed, what was there

for him to say? We had decided to say nothing to Dick Madox about the subject which was preoccupying us. I dare say he may have wondered a little at the way we treated Hope; the studied cheerfulness which veiled our watchfulness of all her doings. She could hardly fail to perceive how we watched her; but at least, he should treat her as an ordinary mortal, and not as one whose death-warrant is already signed. Christopher was very nearly as nervous as I was by this time. He feared that Hope's mind might give way under the strain, or that the smallest accident might startle her spirit out of its dwelling-place. For, to our over-anxious eyes, she looked like a bird on the very edge of its cage, fairly quivering in anticipation of its flight. Perhaps, if our party had contained one middle-aged and unromantic head in its circle, we might have been more sensible; as it was, Dick Madox was the only safe element in its composition at present, and he supplied a balance of good-humour and general gaiety which was sincere and therefore priceless.

On the morning of the 18th Christopher was up betimes.

"It is the last day, Madeline," he said to me, and his usually ruddy face was quite pale and worn. "I have been awake for hours thinking of Hope. I expect she has not slept a wink, and she is certain to be out early. I must be with her wherever she goes to-day. Pray for us, darling, with all your might. Oh, if we can only tide over the next eighteen hours!"

He would not take his usual swim that morning lest he should miss his sister when she came out; but I saw him from the window climb on to a ledge of rock and stand there looking seaward; and I wondered what would happen before the morning sun should shine into his eyes again.

Presently Hope joined him; a pretty, graceful figure in her print frock, outlined clearly against the sapphire background of the sea. Looking at the two with a full heart I quite forgot the existence of Dick Madox, till I heard him scramble from his low window on to the turf, with a shout: "Stand where you are; don't move!" and I caught sight of his sketch-book and a radidly-working pencil. Christopher glanced back with a smile at him, but Hope stood still, the light gleaming on her hair and the breeze just stirring the folds of her gown.

Dick was not long over his sketch, and when he had done he ran down to join them, and they went away across the smooth

sands together. Breakfast was waiting when they returned, for Dick had insisted upon getting to the top of an exceedingly precipitous rock, just to see what was on the other side; and they said it had been necessary to follow in order to pick up the possible fragments. He was full of plans for an excursion, which the state of the tides favoured, to some seldom explored caves under the cliffs several miles away, and Christopher favoured the idea. Both men, however, wanted Hope's company, and this she refused.

"I shall stay with Madeline," she said, and I could see that her lips trembled. "Indeed, I would rather not go."

"Let her do as she likes," said I, trying to speak lightly. "Suppose we make a compromise. You two shall go and explore, and Hope and I will come and meet you when it gets cooler. Really, I think it will be too hot for walking in the middle of the day."

But Christopher objected. He had made up his mind that Hope should be in his safe keeping for that particular time; and I was truly thankful, for I dreaded to be left alone with her to face the unknown evil. And after some more discussion Hope gave in with a pitiful little smile. After all, it did not much signify. If this thing was to be, it was to be. But I felt, when she came to give me a parting kiss, what a world of emotion lay beneath her self-restraint. I would not let her see how agitated I was too, but chattered on about the luncheon-basket and the place where I was to meet them in the evening, as if nothing were the matter.

Then I went out and watched them disappear in the distance, with a sinking heart; and I am sure Janet must have thought me demented, I was so restless and disquieted all that long summer's day. Every moment I dreaded terrible tidings; even the very cries of the gulls sounded like signals of distress, and the footsteps of the postwoman coming in quite an opposite direction from that which the walkers had taken, seemed verily like the knell of doom to my excited imagination.

I could eat no lunch. I could neither read nor work, and I hastened on the tea-hour as if that would bring me nearer to the sun-setting. When at last the shadows began to grow appreciably longer, I told Janet that I was going to meet the party, and that we should all be at home before dusk. I said this with an

assurance which I was far from feeling, and even gave minute directions about supper, though I believe I hardly expected such a meal would ever be required.

Janet accompanied me up the steepest part of the cliff, as she was going to the farm for some cream, but our paths after that diverged, and we soon lost sight of each other. It was one of those perfect evenings when the beauties of sea and sky almost weigh the soul down with a sort of regret that one cannot appreciate and enjoy them more. Exquisite scenery often makes me sad, and there is always, to my mind, a pathos about the sunset hour which no other time of day possesses.

The solitude about me was complete. No sign of human habitation was in sight, and even the ships were so far out that I could scarcely distinguish them on the horizon.

Surely by this time I ought to hear the sound of voices, to see at least some sign of distant figures. I climbed a little heathery knoll and looked around me, but except for the sea birds, I was quite alone; and the apprehensions which had been weighing me down all day rushed upon me with tenfold force. I felt convinced that "it," the dreaded catastrophe, had happened, and that was the reason of their lateness. Christopher had promised me to be at home by six, and he was a man of his word. It was six now, and they must still be miles away. Oh! why had I not made an effort to accompany them so that at least this agony of suspense might have been spared me?

The utter helplessness and nothingness of humanity appalled me as I stood there in the sunshine under the wide sky, with the solemn leagues of water stretching away on either hand.

Of what use were my prayers, my protestations, I, a mere atom, a speck of dust?

My faith seemed verily to waver, and the unspoken words were in my heart:

"If God lets Hope die I can never love him any more!"

I never said the words, but I know that they were there.

The weather, as I have said, was unusually warm, and the short, close turf on the cliff was burnt brown and had become treacherously dry and slippery; in fact, in places it was almost like smooth ice. Christopher had often warned us not to go too close to the edge during our dally scrambles, and we had been very cautious, for the rocks below were bristling and jagged, and the

breakers were generally formidable, even in the calmest weather. This evening, however, no thought of danger from that quarter entered my head.

But fancying that I heard voices down below me, and not knowing whether there might possibly be a way of returning by the beach which I had not before discovered, I hastily stepped to the brink to look over.

My ears, however, had deceived me; there was no one there, and, moreover, the masses of rock and the huge boulders, amongst which the huge waves were surging, lay piled at the foot of the cliff in such a manner as to quite prevent the most active of walkers from attempting to find a route that way.

But I had forgotten my husband's warnings; and even as I came to the precipitous edge, my feet slipped from under me, the very ground itself seemed to give way, and I fell, vainly grasping at a tuft of sea-pinks to stay myself. Even in that instant, before I lost consciousness, a feeling of surprise and gladness came over me. Perhaps the curse was to be transferred to me! Perhaps it was I, and not Hope, who was to be sacrificed! and if so, I knew that the powers of the spell would be broken, as I was not a born Barrie. All this passed through my mind with the rapidity of a lightning flash; then came a violent concussion and utter and blank darkness!

* * * * *

Out of a bewildering confusion of sounds one voice reached me at last, coming, it seemed, from somewhere miles away.

It was Hope's voice, imploring me to open my eyes, to speak, to move my hand at least, to show her I was alive. There was a weight as of lead upon my lids, but I struggled to lift them, and looked up into the terrified face, showing dark against the background of golden sky.

"Oh, Hope, what is it?"

My words were muffled and indistinct; I did not understand what had happened, nor where I was.

"Thank God," was Hope's fervent answer. "Don't try to move yet; lie still, my darling; you must not attempt to get up. You have had a terrible fall, and all these loose stones slipped with you. I will lift them away first and then we can see if you are much hurt."

I was too dazed and frightened to fully understand what she

said, but I lay still obediently ; in truth, I could not move for the stones which half-covered me, and just at the present moment I felt scarcely any pain ; that was to come later.

Hope worked rapidly and almost in silence ; her cheeks were deadly pale, she had torn her dress and lost her hat, but I was not able to question how she came there.

In supreme moments such as these even the most remarkable incidents appear perfectly common-place and natural ; it is only afterwards that we have time to wonder how they occurred.

"Your head is all right," she said, at last, coming to kneel beside me and passing her hands lightly over it, "and your neck is not broken ; that is something to be thankful for !" The suspicion of tears in her voice brought the reality of them into my eyes, but she begged me to be calm.

"It will help me so much more if you will not cry, darling," she said earnestly. "I haven't very much strength myself, and if you give way, what *shall* I do ?"

The piteous entreaty in her face restrained my hysterical inclination, and she proceeded with her examination.

"Right arm ? yes, you can lift it and move it. Now the left—ah ! don't try to raise it ; I am afraid it is broken."

"I am sure it is," I said faintly. "I did not feel it at first, but when you pushed that heavy stone off the pain was excruciating."

Hope looked about her desperately.

Fortunately, my parasol had been in my hand when I fell, and she seized upon it at once. I don't know where she learnt her surgery, but in a few minutes she had denuded the stick of its surroundings, snapped it in two, and with its "bones" and a soft sash from her own waist, put the injured arm into rough but serviceable splints.

Then she inquired if I could raise myself, which I did without much difficulty. It was marvellous to find how comparatively few were my hurts ; the fact of the crumbling edge of the cliff having given way when I fell accounted for my not being more injured. I had slid rather than tumbled down the face of the precipitous incline, and the stout serge skirt I wore had protected me to some extent from the shower of stones. But I knew, and so did Hope, that there was another life in danger beside my own, and though I made as light of my fall as I could, it was impossible to ignore the gravity of the situation. Here we were, two helpless

women, at the foot of an unclimbable precipice, with the incoming tide thundering among the boulders at our feet and sending up its spray into our faces ; with night advancing, and no means of letting any one know where we were. Even if we had the chance of hailing a passing boat, which was very unlikely, it would be perfectly impossible to be rescued from the sea side, as there was no landing place among those jagged rocks, whose black points stood up, like cruelly bristling fangs, far out from the shore.

"How did you get here, Hope?" I said at last, meeting the terror in her eyes with a poor attempt at cheerfulness. "If you could come down to me, surely Christopher can too! I should not mind anything if only he were here."

The physical dread of death was pressing sorely upon me now. Just at first I had thought it would be sweet to die if, by so dying, Hope might be suffered to live; but now that she was beside me, safe and well, with the fatal day nearly ended, I wanted life too, and life meant Christopher! If I could touch his hand again I should feel safe. But Hope shook her head.

"It was like this," she said. "We were all coming home, and should have been back by 6 o'clock, as Christopher promised, only Mr. Madox would stop sketching. He is so tiresome about his 'little bits.' And Christopher wouldn't let me come on and meet you, and yet he couldn't leave Mr. Madox, because the sun was in his eyes, and he wanted the umbrella held over his head, stupid man! I climbed up to the top of a little mound, and I saw you, as I thought, ever so far away, going towards the farm. It came into my head that you had mistaken the way we had gone, and I thought, by taking a cross cut, I could stop you before you had gone too far. So I said to Christopher that I saw you, and would go and meet you. It was some one in a light hat and blouse, whom I mistook for you."

"Janet, going for cream," I explained, thinking with a sort of tragic amusement of the supper I had ordered. "I gave her a hat of mine only yesterday; she had nothing shady to wear, and her freckles were getting quite a burden to her."

"Christopher said, 'All right, go and meet her,'" continued Hope, "and I hurried off, but I just began to think that it wasn't you, after all, when I saw your parasol fluttering in quite an opposite direction. It was on the very edge of the cliff!" She

shuddered at the recollection. "I heard you call out, and then a great noise of stones falling, and I simply flew! I believe I came down almost on top of you, but I don't know how I did it! I only know that I found myself down here, and that I was quite ten minutes trying to make you open your eyes! I wish now I had waited to tell Christopher, for he is certain to go on to the farm, and it may be ever so long before he discovers us." So it proved. The wind freshened as the night came on, and any shouts the seekers might raise were quite inaudible to us. The gold and crimson faded away and the stars came out, and still we two crouched together on an insecure slope, scarcely venturing to move, so near and so threatening did those hungry waves appear, and so terribly insecure seemed the masses of crumbling rock which were poised above and around us.

Hope had a couple of dry sandwiches in her pocket, and with these she insisted on feeding me, by morsels at a time, though I was altogether disinclined for food.

We tried in turn to keep up each other's spirits; but as the time went on and an increasing chilliness made itself felt in the damp air, we grew more and more unhappy and silent; and the acute pain of my fractured arm and numerous bruises seemed to become less bearable every moment. At last, as the result of an impatient movement, the intensity of my sufferings made me faint away once more, and this, as Hope told me later, was the climax.

She determined, come what might, to make an attempt at scaling the cliffs. She felt certain that I should die if I were left much longer where I was; and now that a merciful unconsciousness had overtaken me, it seemed less cruel to leave me alone. So she began a perilous descent to the beach first, hoping from there to see some possible pathway to the top. There was practically no shore here; the waves washed right up to the face of the precipice, and had eaten out long caverns underneath, where they roared and boomed with a hollow never-ceasing thunder. And Hope's heart utterly failed her when at length she stood on one of the slippery boulders looking up at the frowning heights above.

No one, not even the most surefooted of goats, could clamber up those overhanging rocks. The coming down almost seemed miraculous as viewed from beneath. But she gained one new

idea from her scramble. Here and there, wedged among the stones, or dashed high and dry into little crannies where only winter storms could reach, were pieces of drift wood, and Hope had matches in her pocket, for they had taken a little Etna with them on their excursion, all being believers in tea as a refreshment during a long day's tramp. The Etna was far away enough, in Christopher's keeping, but at least we could have a fire, and besides the warmth it would be a splendid beacon in case any boat were out in search of us.

It was far more difficult to get back to where I was than it had been to leave me; more especially as Hope was laden with materials for her bonfire.

She must have risked her life half-a-dozen times, while I lay there like a log, adding to her terrors by the length of my insensibility. But when I came back to life again, there was a comforting little blaze in a sheltered cleft beside me, and Hope was rubbing my numbed feet with anxious energy. She was so busy that she had no time to look about her; but as I lay there, slowly realizing once more our strange situation, it seemed to me that I saw, clear against the misty background of water, another light, quite distinct from the fitful rays of our impromptu signal.

"Hope, is it a boat?" I gasped the words out incoherently, for I was well nigh exhausted.

Hope thought that I was wandering, but a cry of joy escaped her as she turned her head. I told her afterwards that I had never imagined a woman could shout as she shouted that night! She piled on all the wood she had collected and stirred the blaze madly. She waved burning sticks in the air, and she raised shrieks that were perfectly ear-piercing to me, but which seemed carried away and lost altogether in the mingled sounds of wind and sea. Nevertheless, we were certain that a shout came to us in reply, and that the light bobbed up and down in answer to our signals.

I said I could hear Christopher's voice (he told me afterwards it was a boatman's), and we both cried in a most childish fashion, which perhaps was not to be wondered at.

And then the friendly light disappeared, and there was a long period of suspense and painful watching for what would come next.

Our rescue was an extremely difficult one, but once our exact whereabouts was discovered, the coastguardsmen knew what to

do. A rope ladder was let down at some distance further on, and at length some help reached us. Need I say that Christopher came first, and after him, Mr. Madox, hardly less eager to be of use.

They had a chair with them, and somehow we were drawn up into a place of safety. But I realized none of it.

It seemed to me that death came with the rescuers, but I did not fear him, for his face was like Christopher's.

* * * *

After all, we were back in our lodgings before the day-dawn, though our few hours' misery will always seem like ages to look back upon. It was only natural that Christopher had followed us, as he thought, to the farm.

There a small girl, the only person at home, told him that a lady had been there and gone again. The lady was in reality Janet, but Christopher concluded otherwise, and felt sure that I must have met Hope just outside and returned home with her.

When he reached our lodgings, he at once discovered his mistake, and grew suddenly alarmed. Mr. Madox was disposed to make light of his fears, but when Christopher told him briefly the facts of the case, nothing could exceed his energy in the search. The surface of the downs is broken up into innumerable little hollows, and it took a long time to be certain that we were not seated in one of these nooks, enjoying a quiet read, or chat, as it was frequently our custom to be. To make matters more perplexing, a party of strangers were visiting the Lizard that day, and the two men careered wildly after a half-a-dozen light parasols and cotton frocks, till they fairly frightened the visitors off under the impression that the region was haunted by a pair of wandering lunatics.

At last Christopher and Mr. Madox set off for Lizard Town to ask advice, and just as the dusk grew into darkness, a boat was manned as a sort of forlorn hope. Christopher did not much believe in it: circumstances seemed to point to our being inland, rather than on the coast, but he grasped eagerly at any new idea. Without Hope's beacon it is doubtful even then if they would have discovered us, and we should have spent the night where we were. As it was, we had been there quite long enough. Mr. Madox rushed off for a doctor as soon as ever we were delivered from our perilous position; but, as I say, I knew nothing of all that.

Only once, when I was safe at our lodgings, under Janet's tender ministrations, did consciousness return to me.

"Is it to-morrow?" I said incoherently. "Is the 18th of June over yet?"

Hope understood me, though Janet did not. She bent over to kiss me with a strange light in her wet eyes.

"The dawn is breaking, Madeline, darling; the 18th is come—and gone."

Two days later, a new and minute Miss Barrie opened her eyes upon this world of strange vicissitudes. As Hope came to my bedside, with trembling cheerfulness, I put the tiny fingers into hers.

"The old woman's words have come true at last," I whispered. "The curse came with a child's hand, and with a child's hand it is taken away. You risked your own life for her and me, and the hateful spell is broken for ever."

Mr. Madox never tired of descanting on Hope's pluck and presence of mind during our adventure. He would make her take him to the spot and describe minutely what had happened; and the two began to be so happy together that they did not want other society, for which Christopher and I were grateful to them. Hope told me since that all the long hours of her watch she never thought of the "doom" which she had been dreading for years. The vision of Christopher's anguish, if anything happened to me, blotted out all other imaginations, and the unpoetical nature of our rescue, just at the witching hour of midnight, quite put any more tragic notions out of her head. So after all, I learned to think of my tumble over the Cornish cliffs as a most fortuitous occurrence, and Mr. and Mrs. Madox regard it in the same light.

The present Miss Barrie, of Barries' Court, may hear the legend with my consent now. I have ceased to dread any evil consequences from the sin of the haughty Lady Elinor. The lives Hope saved, at the risk of her own, may have atoned, who knows? for those others, sacrificed in the far away past. All the same, I would not call my baby Elinor, though of course I am not superstitious. She is named Stella, and was veritably our star, heralding the dawning of brighter days for Barries' Court.

FLORENCE L. HENDERSON.

Per
V O O R C T S N T A S H C A F E

